

Volume 2.13



Editor's Note

Somewhere in time we may see a better world, a better place where senseless violence is non-existent. Fat chance, right? Senseless violence is America. We see it; we breathe it; we talk about it; damn, we live it; yet, most of us truly hate it.

This past weekend in the San Francisco BVHP (Bay View Hunters Point) community, a San Francisco Police Officer was shot and killed by a recently released CYA parolee, leaving behind the officer's three-year-old child and wife. Tragic. Shhh, it's always a tragedy when we hear of murder. It seems like every day for the . . . who knows how many years, probably from the beginning of The Beat's time, we have heard you writers tell us about friends — innocent and not-so-innocent — being taken out of the game of life by senseless violence. Predominantly gun violence, too. We've heard your stories, and we'll continue to hear your stories and read your RIPs, and, as always, question you and ourselves. Why? Why the senseless violence? Why would someone risk their life by pulling a trigger? For what? Stupid. So many of these mostly young men of color leave behind heartbroken mothers, children, friends and more family members, as do the victims of this tragedy.

Over the years, when a loved one dies, we hear numerous excuses about the violence, from seeking to avenge another murder, to protecting a turf from the OGs fresh out of the CDC/CYA, to drugs, to straight hate for life, to the system (government and corrections) creating an oppressed community whose generations of families have little hope or pride. Not much has changed over the years in our (ghetto, barrio) communities from BVHP to Sunnysdale, to the Mission District, to East, North and West Oakland, all the way down south to San Jose and every other barrio and ghetto in between and beyond. The story goes on . . . drug dealers and addicts, gang members and thugs, bad schools or no schools, missing parents and single parents, corner stores and alcohol, guns, guns, and more guns, and it all equals a bunch of destruction and plenty of RIPs, and for a host of others, a sure trip to juvenile hall/jail (aka The Correctional System), then a cell, all alone to ponder your many thoughts. Eventually, if you're lucky, we suppose, to be let out of your cell for a block of time amongst many folks of the same sex, and then you'll have a whole 'nother program to learn. In time, you are introduced to the courtroom, where you're enrolled in a very painful class called, "Welcome to The Judicial System 101!" And most of you know how that goes.

Don't get us wrong, many young people do succeed and learn their lesson, yet the ones we deal with each week in our juvenile hall workshops learn the hard, the very hard way, as they fall farther and farther away from the free world they knew once upon a time.

What is that "hard way"? Well, let's allow our writers, our readers, aka our teachers, to tell you their stories . . .

Hey, you're in luck, it's all right here in this powerful issue (9.13) for you to read. It is our hope that by reading this special Beat "system" issue, you'll gain more insight into the system. You'll also see how many of these young people need to be looked at as individuals, and not just as numbers, or colors, or the crime they allegedly committed. Maybe your questions will not even be answered, if that's the case, then we encourage you to ask more, or give us your take by writing a piece for The Beat Within/Out. We truly need to work together to get our words out, to hopefully save more than one person from falling deeper into the system, not to mention being introduced to a place where all of your freedom is stripped and/or into a community filled with mourning.

With this said, the "system" topic our workshop participants were given is as follows:

The System: For this issue, we're going to discuss issues related to the criminal justice system. This week we're calling on you to step up and teach from your experience.

There has been a lot of media attention devoted to the system's problems, and there have been hearings, press conferences, newspaper articles and proposals about how to reform it.

Due to this attention, we are going to devote the topics for this week to discussing the criminal justice system. We want to expose all of these people to voices they usually aren't able to hear (or don't listen to) — your voices, the voices of those whom their proposals and articles and sentences affect.

As always, you are welcome to write on topics other than the ones we'll discuss today, but we will hold those pieces for a future Beat. It is our goal to get this issue of The Beat into the hands of those who are devoting so much attention to the problems in the system — the judges, the probation and parole officers, the district attorneys and public defenders, the politicians, and the reporters who are dealing with prison and juvenile justice reform. Treat this as an opportunity to teach, step up, and inform — we'll do our best to make sure you are heard.

Consider the following questions:

What is one thing you would change about the system?

Is there one person who works in the system who has helped you?

How could the system have handled your situation better?

Is the system helping you or hurting you?

Does the system live up to the hype you'd heard before you were locked up?

Aside from the obvious (being away from your family, having to ask to go to the bathroom, etc.) what don't you like about being incarcerated?

Once you get out, what will you have learned from the system that you feel you could teach someone else?

What's one practical thing you'd change about the system?

When do second chances end? What should the system do then?

What words and labels come to mind when you think about people who have been or are incarcerated?

Is the punishment you've received or are facing appropriate to the crime you're accused of committing? Why or why not?

Has incarceration changed you? If so, how?

If one of your friends, or a younger sibling, were about to enter the system, how would you describe it? What would you tell them?

What have you discovered about yourself while incarcerated?

If the governor, or any politician, showed up in your unit to hear your suggestions and grievances about being incarcerated, what would you tell him?

What do you think motivates the decisions the judge, your PO, the DA, and others make in your case?

Take these questions where you need to take 'em — answer one, answer all, or use them as inspiration to talk about your own experience."

In this packed system issue, you have a host of gems to read. What makes this issue different from others is that besides it being solely an issue of writings about the "system," we are also featuring Beat Within juvenile hall and BWO (Beat Without) "system" writings from the last few years. A sort of blast from the past. Plus, the BWO writings in this issue are predominantly "system" writings. Like we said, plenty of thoughtful pieces, along with your typical, "the system sucks" responses.

So, as is the tradition of every Beat issue, we would like to present the names of our POW (Piece of the Week) recipients. Congratulations to our man Keek from the 150 Crew for stepping up huge with his incredible narrative titled, "Court Day and How I Take It." We also have very thoughtful pieces from Estrella, M.Reezzy and Mei out of SF/YGC. We have Andrew from Napa and Conrad from Marin who passionately weigh in with solid efforts. Hey, there are more POWs out of 150! Big props to Gerrell, Dan, Ben, Tishay, Alainia, and The Stunna Boy who lace us with their perspectives on the "system." Lastly, we encourage you to check out Jp's poem and Young Vell's commentary on the system, both of these San Mateo writers give us plenty to chew on. Thank you POW writers!

OK, here we sit, putting the final touches on our very special 9.13 issue devoted solely to writings on the "system." We must stress how many of you writers stepped up to tackle our lone topic, and we are thankful for that. It is our goal, our duty, to see to it that this issue touches as many people as possible, from the various youth workers, to the school teachers, to the policymakers, to the politicians at all levels, to the many, many peace officers (from juvenile counselors to police officers), to family members, and to friends. We want this issue to impact you readers. We want you to learn from this issue. We want this issue to cause you to do something good for yourself, your family, and your community.

We are very interested and anxious to hear what you have to say after reading this issue, so write us and let us know if you liked this special issue, and if you think we should do another special issue down the road. Feedback is important.

As for our editorial note contest, well, our deadline was April 8, 2004. For your information, the contest question is/was, "What have you done in your life that you wish you could do over, and how would you go about doing it over?" With that said, in issue 9.14 we will begin showcasing these contest writings in The BWO. Not as many contributions as we had hoped for, yet the writings look like an excellent read.

Also, in issue 9.14, we will announce our next editor's-note writing contest question.

Well, well, well, we've set the tone, ed note readers, for what is in store for you in this issue. We are very proud of what we have created with the writings of you step-up writers. In our eyes, this magnificent issue is a keeper.

Many of you may not agree with this dedication, given your feelings towards those who work in the system, yet we feel it is only appropriate to give our respects to police Officer Isaac Espinoza who was killed this past weekend in the line of duty, and our condolences go out to his family and friends in mourning. RIP Officer Espinoza.

May this be the beginning of the end of the senseless gun violence that has plagued our communities for too long.

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The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our communities already—we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

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Art: Much props to everyone for the great art this week.

Spiritual Advisor: Jack Jacqua

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Writers: Thanks to all the participants in our workshops in the San Francisco's Youth Guidance Center and Log Cabin Ranch School and the Walden House Facility, Maricopa County, Arizona, Walden House, Canon Barcus Community Center, San Mateo, Napa, Santa Clara, San Luis Obispo, Alameda County, Santa Cruz County and Marin County Juvenile Halls. As well as Riker's Island in New York City, Natural Bridge in Virginia, and Hidden Truth in Rhode Island. If you have any questions or comments about The Beat Within, or if you would like to become a subscriber, contact us at: 275 Ninth St. SF.CA. 94103 or call (415)503-4170 or check us out at

www.thebeatwithin.org

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COUNSELOR'S CORNER

From The Beat: Ms. Wadud would never let The Beat Within down, especially when it comes to writing thoughtful pieces for The Beat Within. As far as we are concerned she is one of the best juvenile hall counselors. She gets involved, she shows her love and an amazing commitment towards her work and the young people she touches. We only wish more counselors would take a few minutes to get involved with us. Thank you Ms. Wadud for sharing your thoughts in our special "system" issue.

You're Just Money In The Bank

On the real, I believe the system is motivated, like most other organizations that are run by this country by money!!

The majority of incarcerated youth unfortunately, become incarcerated adults. Incarcerated adults make furniture, license plates, clothing and a number of other items that help the economy. These inmates get paid from 35 cents to 1 dollar a day. Cheap labor! Not even minimum wage!

Most prisons and institutions have programs where an individual can earn their high school diploma or college degrees. But once they do their time and are released to their families, they have a hard time getting employment because of their past record. Every job application asks, "Were you ever arrested or convicted of a crime?" Once you answer, "Yes," they don't want to hire you. So, many of these people start selling drugs or robbing people, going back to doing the same thing they were doing before they came to jail.

Even with their diplomas and degrees it seems like society has a black mark on these people. And they don't have a great support system or people in their lives to help them get on their feet until someone gives them a chance.

What choice do they have? The system is designed to keep you coming back.

But you, you have to be strong and pray and make the choice to get out and stay out!

God bless you all.

-Ms. Wadud, 150 Counselor



Court Day and How I Take It

It's Wednesday, 3/24/2004. I just woke up and already have to sit. I'm not nervous, just anxious to get this over with.

I pretty much already know what is going to happen, in court, so I have already mentally prepared myself.

I'm done washing up and am now waiting on my sorry excuse for a bed. I start to doze off when I suddenly hear a loud...KNOCK! KNOCK!

"TIME For COURT!"

I get up with a evil look towards the staff member. I hate getting woken up so rudely.

I walk over to the counter and hop up to have some shackles put on me. I am assisted off of the counter as if the staff actually cares about me being hurt. I put my hands up to have the thick leather belt secured snug around my waist. My hands are then placed in cuffs that are connected to the belt. I hate the long pains taking walk from this max unit to the entrance for intake.

Once I am here, I again wait. This time 30 minutes for the transporter to go pick up other kids from other units. We all are then packed into a van like a can of sardines.

After the long hot ride to downtown Oakland we are removed one by one from the van. We are given room numbers and released from our restraints. In my assigned cell, I sit directly under the heater vent, in front of the filthy window on the bed.

I prefer the light side (of the building). The light side for me is depressing and inspirational at the same time. The light side has windows and the dark side (of the building) doesn't. Hence the name.

The depressing side about being on the light side is that you can see your family entering and leaving the court house. And no matter how much you bang and yell at them they cannot hear you because of the ambiance of downtown Oakland. And even if you luckily manage to get your family's attention, they will not be able to pinpoint exactly where you are. No human being I have even met has been able to see past the inch of filth covered windows that are uncleanable because they are set between a metal gate and small squares cut out of thick cement. Plus, the windows are located approximately 40 feet above the ground.

The inspiring part about being on the light side is being able to see outside. Sometimes when I look outside and see all the beautiful cars with big, blingin', dub dueces, it makes me think about

my future and reminds me that I still have one. It makes me continue to push myself through these hard times and makes me want to succeed even more in life. Not only for myself and family, but to stick it to the man (society) by beating the extreme odds.

CREEEEEK! The door opens and the cockeyed man says, "They're ready for you!"

I walk down the hallway through two solid doors, one metal and the other wood. I sit on the small one bench room next to this fat kid that looks like a troll, waiting for the pig (officer) to open the door and bring me into the courtroom. Once I am seated and my chair is pulled all the way in, the judge gives the instructions to let my family in. They come in and fill the seats. Immediately, my baby brother starts to cry and scream because he wants to come to me. So the judge tells my aunt she must take Oscar (my little brother) outside. My aunt becomes furious, repeats the word shit about four times and storms out of the courtroom with my brother in her arms.

After that, the judge tells me a bunch of BS, that I have already gone over, with my public defender.

The judge then asks me do I accept the plea bargain. Which is, admit to 1 charge of ADW (Assault with a Deadly Weapon) and 1 charge of armed robbery. With these two charges my max is 6 years at the "Y."

I took the plea bargain and looked over to my family seeing them all teary eyed and some were even crying.

The judge says my Dispositional Hearing is on April 8, 2004 at 9am.

I am then escorted out of the courtroom.

Now back in my cell staring out of my window, I see my family walk to their cars, crying, and slowly drive off out of my sight. I sit back against the window, and I think back on how my feelings were/are dramatically changed as I looked to the left at my family.

I felt calm and content, then my feelings leaped into fear, heartache, and regretfulness. I even dropped a tear. Sitting up on the bed, for I don't know how long, I doze off and woke up to more shackles and cuffs and immediately think, this is just the beginning, I still have a long hard road ahead of me.

-Keek, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You deliver an incredible narrative Keek! YOU force the reader to take this painful journey with you. YOU give the reader an amazing taste of what you faced. This is great writing to say the least. We do not like to use the word "great" a lot, but you step up huge with this important read.

I walk down the hallway through two solid doors, one metal and the other wood.

I sit on the small one bench room next to this fat kid that looks like a troll, waiting for the pig (officer) to open the door and bring me into the courtroom



Many Things Should Change

Well, for starters, I think this is a really good topic for us to talk about. I think that there are many things that they should change about the system.

First, I think it should start from the staff that surrounds us in the unit. They should have more patience and maybe more communication with us, because this is not prison, we are juveniles; we need guidance and understanding. We need someone who can really have a conversation and now that we are being listened to, because half of us don't have no one who we can talk to on the outs because we come from broken homes with a lot of different kinds of abuse. So when we come in here, we want to feel that there is someone who is willing to help us.

What I think is that there should be a better education for us, because some of the work we get is like 6th or 7th grade work. The teachers ain't even willing to help us become successful students. Instead, they give us a piece of paper and tell us to do the work and shut up. So I think that education should improve up in here. We need computers, better updated books/GED program, and independent studies, but at the moment, we don't even have that up in here.

There are so many things that really have to be changed, but if I were to say them all, I would not even be able to finish. But anyways, I think that they system is getting so much stricter. They ain't even playing wit' us no more.

I actually have grown up in the system. Since I was 12, I have been coming up here. I have spent all my childhood in a cell. I am turning 18 in July. But really, I have learned so many things from being locked up. Basically I am institutionalized, and the only thing I can say is that it is hard for me to believe that this is not a game no more.

I have gone through much shhh throughout all my life, but I have learned in my days of solitude that the only way I can change my life is by believing in myself that I can succeed. I have learned to not let no one put me down. No matter what happens, I will always try to succeed, and those are the words of encouragement I can give you all because no matter what happens, we might be criminals in the eyes of authority, but really we are worth so much. We have so many talents amongst us that we could use, but we just need to put in work because after every storm there is always gonna be a rainbow. Always love.

-Estrella GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You are a gem, Estrella. You have been through a lot, but you still manage to see and think clearly. You have a real talent for writing, and we, and all Beat readers, are lucky to read your wisdom. How have you managed to educate yourself despite the mediocre education you receive in the Hall? What advice do you have for the folks who haven't yet learned to believe in themselves and their talents?

To Change The System

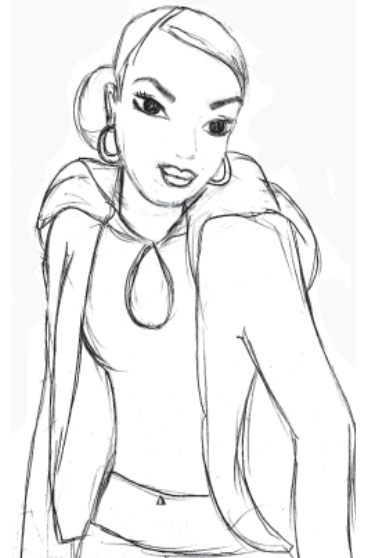
If one thing I would change about the system, it would be don't send kids out of their own state.

In the system, my PO helped me, but I just didn't listen to my PO. This system helped me because my PO cared about me. He made a schedule for me every week.

I know a lot of people think the system is hurting them, but I think the system is helping me.

-Mei B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This is one of the few pieces we've received about "The System" which actually makes a specific suggestion for change. Why do you think it's wrong for youngsters to be sent out of state for placements? Besides making a weekly schedule for you, how else is your PO helping you? Why do you think your PO is helping you when so many other youngsters complain about their POs? Will you be listening to your PO better when you get out this time than before you came in?



**We've got to
step up and
no matter
what happens
never give in
'Cause as
long as we're
still breathin'
the future
burns bright
and a beat
will beat
within.**

The Product

We're products of our environment criminals in their eyes
Entrapped in a justice system filled with corruption and lies

With very word I spit it's dearer to realize

That most of us won't make it no matter how hard we try

And those of us that do accept a cup of suffering so large

The Juvenile elites that fought when times got hard

When the chips were stacked against them they chose to play it smart

Now they're one step ahead of those who don't know where to start

In many ways it feels like we're just set up to fail

And everyday that passes by is one more step to county jail

The only way to escape the pain is through the letters

In the mail

I would of chose a different path if I knew what this one entailed

We've morphed from a human into a crime rate

As I watch all my homies lose their lives and violence escalate

2 — 4 is becoming more common because for some of us think it's too late

Those of us that give up, don't become rehabilitated we become consumed by hate

We've got to step up and no matter what happens never give in

'Cause as long as we're still breathin' the future burns bright and a beat will beat within.

-Andrew, Napa

From The Beat: If you are a product of your environment then what is your role? You've just played into the system trying to dig out of your hole. You can see it as a set up but to fail is on you. You can do whatever you want but that's only if you want to. No one can live your life, and no one can make decisions for you. So don't pay attention when the people that judge don't even know you. Just shake it off, keep playing it raw or soft, and if you trip and you fail, then just think to prevail and remember everything that you was taught.



My Concrete Thoughts

Cement walls
 Nothing more, nothing less
 An hour of me
 Is this all just a test?
 With a court date comin' up, wearing your blue sweater
 You try your hardest to write the judge a letter
 Bootsy attorney who supposed to be on your side
 Won't give the judge the letter, not even a try
 All he has to say is "release him"
 Release him?
 While the DA shoutin' reasons to keep him
 So the judge stops the nonsense to tell us, he made up his mind
 Why don't we just keep this boy until next time?
 Give him seven days and we'll be back
 Arguing about the same stuff,
 I am not trying to hear that yack
 But if I had a choice to go or to stay
 I would neva go, I would always miss my date.
 I've been through enough arguing over me to last me a lifetime
 And every time I hear the arguing, it's like a memorized chime
 The system has my head twisted in all sorts of ways
 But I can't do nothing but count down my days
 Until I get released
 But I know the system won't get right until I am deceased

-Gerrell, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What powerful and passionate writing about your frustrations with the imperfect system. We know that you spent some time on that letter, and the DA wasn't even trying to give it to the judge. That's so disappointing. We hope your plan to be heard works. Either way, you will have to make things work. You are realistic about how we can't wait for the system to change. All we got to focus on is making sure our rights aren't violated and how we can help ourselves. Eventually maybe you can Take care and don't hesitate to ask for more help.

No life no guide, so the system jumps on your back and enjoys the ride

The System Got Me Thinking

I'm stuck in the system constantly thinking,
 Asking help from God to make it through my days and nights,
 Never knowing when rec's over because somebody always gotta fight,
 People get married to the courthouse 'cause their life has become unmanageable,
 No life no guide, so the system jumps on your back and enjoys the ride,
 Can't handle the outs so you come back,
 You might as well slap on a "for sale" sign on your back,
 You don't pay shhh, but your loved ones get pimped,
 By the system, what's this...
 Will when you stop giving them what they want!
 Each day I awake asking God to forgive me for the world for our mistakes,
 Got to stay in the right mind state or my animosity will over take,
 Former detainees reminding me of a deceitful snake,
 Trapped in a world of sin so the system will always win...
 Until someone takes a stand
 And puts their life of crime to an end.

Note: It's not that I can't handle the outs it's that I gave up on myself and went to a crime family instead of family. Lastly, what I mean by "taking a stand," is by just doing the right thing and fly straight or else you will never get out of this place aka the system.

-Ben, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Each week you deliver great on topic poems that speak volumes to us readers. You not only write these deep personal pieces, you courageously step up and read the maloud of the class. You are such an important teacher. We're pulling for you to get through this period and to fulfill your dreams. You have skills Ben!

This County

There's piss on the floor
 Shhh on the wall
 In the Alameda County
 Juvenile Hall
 I got blood on my knuckles
 And sex on my mind
 But that's how it goes
 When you're doin' time
 East side, West side
 Norte, Sureno
 All you gang bangers
 Ain't banging no more
 People try to act hard
 Try to talk shhh about me
 But they're all slaves
 For Alameda County
 Every time I come back
 I feel deprived
 They keep you sufferin'
 But they keep you alive
 Sometimes I don't think
 That I deserve all this
 But then I think of God
 And all the things that I will miss
 I can't blame God
 I know I'm here 'cause of me
 But deep in my heart
 I know I'm meant to be free
 Through all my sins
 Through all my greed
 It's still so hard
 To give up the weed
 I made a pact to myself
 That I ain't coming back again
 But I still have a feeling
 That this isn't the end
 And when I close my eyes
 I wish it wasn't real
 The things I remember
 The guilt that I feel.

-Dan, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Damn, that flow was bustin'. What can you do so that you don't come back? What do you need to change about your life on the outs? How do you deal with feelings of guilt when they arise? What do you think needs to be done so that the conditions of Juvenile Hall improve?





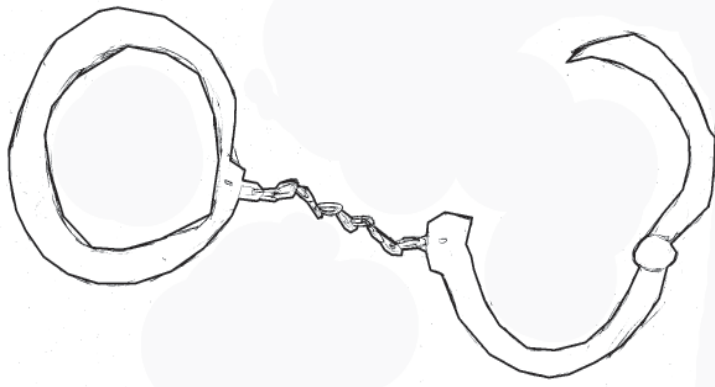
No Love From The System

The system showin' no love,
lockin' us down, holdin' a grudge with no hesitation,
slappin' us with time for us to find another mind.
We would, but we can't rewind to rectify the things we did wrong.
Now we wanna run, but somethings ain't designedly done.
If I really had a chance to remonstrate the system
I'll demonstrate that we are sometimes the victims.
Since I can't, I'll just use my fortitude and get stronger
and my rectitude for time if it last longer
My program, I have to deplete
'cause I'm gonna do the time and not let the time do me.
I hope all The Beat writers feel the same way,
'cause we ain't here to stay.
The system could do what they do now,
but one day they'll pay for the pain, suffering and loneliness they caused us.
We just keep our head up and dust them off us.

-Tishay, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Props for maintaining your composure towards the system that has done you wrong in some ways. We know that you are aware of how you done yourself wrong too but it is very important to remind the system that juveniles are victims too. It is good that you don't act out towards the system because you know what goes around comes around. You are a take charge lady. Take charge of your life first. Then one day we hope you will help improve the system by voting and building up your community so the same thing doesn't happen to more people.

**When you
want to go
home and
realize
there's no
one to go
to
That's
losing you**



The System's Monopoly

This system is a cold game, just like Monopoly. Except in this game you are the board piece and the system is the monopoly man. Once you are on probation, and you are passing go, this is just the start. You will have many dice rolls where there is no telling where you will land. Most likely you will land on just visiting/jail where you will come in and out a few times, then get out on probation. It is all part of the game.

Every time you get locked up, you pay the bank. You pay it with your time and money, because the system makes a lot of money off your incarceration. After probation comes the group homes, which to me is free parking, another money making scheme. You sit, the system collects. You become the property the system rents out to various programs and institutions.

Don't even think you're landing on Park Place or Boardwalk, no luxury involved. Don't get too comfortable playing this game because just like the real Monopoly, it can last forever.

The system isn't about rehabilitation, it's about money, so if you don't want to feed the bank, don't play.

-M. Reezy B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This is a terrific piece, M.R. By comparing the system to a game of Monopoly, we get a clear picture of the point of the game, making money. Isn't it ironic that while youngsters have wild notions of "stacking they chips," the system is, in truth, stacking them like chips. As long as young people are commodities to be bought, sold and traded, can you come up with any suggestions that would change the system so that the poor youngsters who are caught up in it become the players instead of the played?

Losing You

Getting caught in the system
Losing a cousin to the system
Knowing about the system

That's losing you

When your parents throw you away
No where to go
Forced to make money the wrong way

That's losing you

When you have kids they will only know one parent
or grandparent
Sleeping on benches
Eating at St. Vincent's (free food)

That's losing you

When you have nowhere to turn
When you feel like dying

That's losing you

When you need privacy and you ain't got it
When you in jail and need your hair done
When you want to go home and realize there's no one
to go to

That's losing you

When you're with someone who hits you
When you don't know what to do
When you remember there's always someone there
for you

That's losing you

-Alainia, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Alainia, this is a powerful piece. Do you feel like you're losing yourself? What can someone do when they feel this way? How do you cope? What advice would you offer someone going through, what you've gone through?



THE SYSTEM

Pieces Of the Week

The Truth

The world of young intelligence that is what the youth of today should be labeled throughout the whole US. Instead we are branded new names and are being topics of today's Oakland Tribune and SF Chronicle. Instead we are continuing to be belligerent instead of humbling ourselves to the degree of perfection.

The truth is that African-Americans are suffering from what I call "Wrong-Decision Syndrome" which is evident. I mean look at the murder rate, the inability to bond and compromise with one another is degrading. Are the young youth of today, especially in Oakland, scared of change? 'Cause that is exactly what it seems to be, don't you think?

The bottom line is that if our up and coming adolescence doesn't change, we're going to be ineffective in the future. The government is changing, the way the world turns is changing, and if we don't change with it, there's only going to be two alternatives: incarceration or death.

I mean look at yourself, doesn't everyone wanna live as long as possible, living legally, have a child of their own to teach him or her responsibilities and the meaning of life. There are so many opportunities for us today and they are slowing by passing us by the minute.

The truth is that we are the future and this juvenile stuff is a waste of time — a waste of all our lives. Can't nobody help you or change you but you, me personally I'm going to be 18 pretty soon and education is the equalizer to any opposition, "impossible is nothing." RIP Dre.

-The Stunna Boy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your perspective is not just about the system but the young people in the system. You don't talk about blaming anyone but instead you focus on responsibility and change. This is so good. Do you think that the system can do more to help youth and not put it completely on them to find resources to change? We know it's ultimately up to the person to change but when all odds are against him/her, isn't it the community's responsibility to provide more help? Aren't things like poverty, abuse, and generational incarceration real reasons that are outside a youth's control? How can you look at the whole picture to why you got caught up, so you can understand and maybe become part of the solution in the future? We congratulate you for pushing through and getting your education! Remember that you can ask for help.

The System Judges

The system judges

The system holds grudges

On your past

Waiting for the opportunity to put you away, at last

Don't care where you come from

Or your struggles

They just juggle your future in their hands

Because he is the man

He thinks you're messing up his land

Oh, Man

We need to take a stand

Because he doesn't give a damn

Forget the man and his plan

Because I'm going to raise out of this and be a better man

And make my own plan!

-Jp, San Mateo

From The Beat: Yes! Take your revenge on the system by succeeding, by becoming a better man, by proving them wrong! Is there anyone in the system who doesn't fit this pattern, who wants you to make it and helps you along the way? What does your plan for success look like? What will be your first steps?



Forget The System

First of all, I want to say forget the system. The system is much more than just being in jail. The system on the outs is bad. All these poor people living on the street, hungry with nothing to eat.

The system got all this money for wars, but can't feed the poor. The system expect us to be cool and follow the rules no matter what problems we have in our lives. Shhh, half the time people get in trouble because of their situation, and because of the stress the system has brought to their lives.

To all the readers, keep your heads up and don't let the system bring you down.

-Young Vell, San Mateo

From The Beat: We think you've hit the nail on the head! "The System" is much more than the Hall, YA, and state prisons. It is also the communities we live in, the schools we attend, the jobs we have (or don't have). So, if so many of our problems come from how we live on the outs, what can be done to change that picture? What programs or services might have given you a boost up before you got here? If you could do anything for your community, what would you do?

Help Us!

They say that once you get locked up, you have a 95% chance of coming back. Is it because we're bad people? Are we out-of-control criminals? Or are we victims of a system which perpetuates itself?

Here's a question — how many of you out there have gotten out off the bracelet or probation, and just come right back for some tiny vacation? Or been put in some placement you can't stand, and ran away? I'm sure most of you can empathize.

So is it really a solution to let us out with more rules? Someone always looking over our shoulders? We all obviously have trouble following some rules, so are we really the kind of people who should have to follow extra rules?

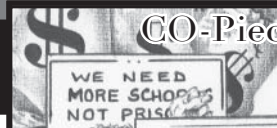
The solution is not to oppress our freedom. The solution is to encourage a change in what we choose to do with our freedom. We, as young, restless people, are the extremes of our generation. We are the strong, the ambitious. If we can live under a system that can encourage and nourish all the strength and power we put into being "thugs," being rebels, fighting so much... If the system could work with us and not against us, we can be the next Martin Luther King Jr, the next Einstein.

Don't suppress us, nourish us, help us!

-Conrad, Marin

From The Beat: You all are already the next Martin Luther Kings, the next Einsteins, the next Tupacs and Hemingways. Maybe the issue is trust. Authorities feel that if you break the existing laws, you have broken a trust and must prove that you're worthy of being let out of Juvy and won't mess up again, if they let you out! So, actually, your freedom is yours to lose and/or keep, meaning, if y'all don't mess up, you're free as you wanna be! Much props on the tight piece!

The system got all this money for wars, but can't feed the poor.



A Day In The System

A day in the hall ain't never been cool.

You have to wake up every day following these county rules.

7:30, wake up, wash up, and then it's back to your room.

8:00, breakfast, it's a no talking meal, so you can eat that little bit of food.

8:30, it's off to school, if you get in line talking then it's back to your room.

8:30 to 12:00, your in the fake ass classes that don't teach you a damn thing.

12:00, it's lunch time. First 5 minutes talking is dead.

1:00, then it's back to school.

2:00, back to the unit square it up. Back row head calls and water, face it down the hallway, front row do the same.

"We will see you the next day." That is the a-m staff saying good bye.

4:00, LME (Large Muscle Exercise) if you are in ALACO juvenile hall you know what that means. Staff gets on the intercom "Come out in your sweats if you don't do this you don't get rec.

5:00, get ready to eat dinner. Everybody be asking staff "can I work, can I work." All they say is we will see, but nine times out of ten they don't pick you.

5:30, stand by your door for dinner. Don't talk or you can eat in your room.

6:00, get ready to shower. Talking is dead in the shower or you won't come out for rec. 7:45 or 8:00, put your bundle (pants) out. Rec. is phone calls, table games, letter writing.

8:45, talking is dead, get on your squares, take it down.

9:30, last head call (use the bathroom). Everybody asking can you get the mail and pass it out. They read it first.

10:00, lights out.

11:00, staff tells us good night. You go to sleep, wake up and do it all over again.

That is a day in Juvenile Hall, and we keep coming back to this.

WHY?

People just get use to this life and they don't change their lives on the outside. They do the same stuff that they always was doing to get in the system in the first place.

-Tramaine, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Tramaine, why? What do you think? How many times have you been back? What do you think it would take for people to stay out of the Hall? Are you used to this life style? Are you able to make a change? We totally appreciate the day in a life or a ward in juvenile hall.

**the system
is ruining
more kids
chances at
life, than
they're
helping
prepare us
and ready
us for a
better one.**

Stuck

For three years I've been stuck in the system

All because I chose not to listen

I wanted to live in the fast lane, to stunt and glisten

And I keep ending up back here, hearing all these people dissin'

I sit in my room thinking of why I got caught slippin'

It stresses me out and I get to trippin'

Wondering what part of the puzzle is missing

I think of why someone else can have so much success

And I ended up in, having to go through all this mess

Thinking of why I am one of the unfortunate ones God didn't bless

Somewhere down the road I found the right way to go

And now I went through pain because God made it so

I guess there really is something He wants me to know

One of those things is that, you reap what you sow

I know for a reason I went through this pain

I know it didn't happen in vain

I thought for a while I might go insane

But I found out it was all in my brain

Now I found I am truly sane

And finally I have happiness flowing through my veins.

-Toni, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Toni, you just knocked our socks off with that one. How do you soak up the lessons that you learn on a daily basis? If you could change things about Juvenile Hall, what would you change? Why do you feel "stuck" in the system? Is it hard to escape the grip the system has on you? What did you sow? What did you reap? We truly appreciate your efforts these last few weeks. You really have a gift as a writer/poet.

The System

The system is just like everything everywhere else. There's not really any understanding of the kid that's here or the judge that makes the decision. Everything is based on one set of rules mainly, so more times than not, the results come out unfair because each case has different circumstances, and each kid learns from their mistakes differently.

People always hear about how kids complain about the system, how it's unfair and doesn't work. When they hear this they just disregard it and figure they're just complainin' 'cause they're here. But even the statistics show that the system is ruining more kids chances at life, than they're helping prepare us and ready us for a better one.

-Daniel, 150 Crew

From The Beat: If you were to design a system that would help people in and out of Juvenile hall, what would it look like? What kind of services would be provided? How much different would it be than the current system? How do you feel the system was unfair in handling your case?

**People just get use to this life
and they don't change their
lives on the outside. They
do the same stuff that they
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system in the first place.**

THE SYSTEM

Co-Pieces Of the Week

The Napa System

Most people think being in Napa County Juvi is being in a day care, they think that it won't help them or it won't change them, but reality is, if you want to change you could change no matter where you are or where you're going. The only person that can change you — is you.

Take me for an example I've been in and out of Napa Juvi about 17 or 18 times, I've been on probation for 5 years for something I didn't even do. I never took being here seriously until this time, because they said that I might go to Camp. Personally, I feel that the system is not trying to help me because of my past. I should go to rehab instead of Camp; I don't have a problem with anything but smoking weed. But I have to deal with what's handed to me and go with the flow, because I want to change and I have to go through the bad to get to the good.

So what I have to do is deal with it and keep my head up high because I want to change and live life in a straight and happy way. I could do it because I want to and I am going to do it.

-Amanda, Napa

From The Beat: You are right Amanda! Anybody can change. It's up to that person to decide whether or not they're ready. We're glad to hear that you wanna change! Now, have you ever asked yourself, why are your reasons for smoking weed? Are you addicted to smoking weed? Do you think it will be hard to stop smoking weed? How can you engage your time in a more productive way?



What I've Discovered In The System

There's one important thing I've discovered about myself while incarcerated. That important thing is patience.

The reason why I say I got patience is because when you're behind the walls you got to deal with the attitudes of the people around you. If I was on the outs, I would not deal with that, I would go off. But since I'm in here, I got to have patience to not catch another case.

You also got to deal with your little five-minute phone calls. Damn, that be irritating when they be like two minutes.

One more thing is when the counselors be giving you time for being on your window! Shhh! That's the only thing you could look out of that there be movement at. But it's cool 'cause when I get out I've developed my patience and could deal with stuff without getting mad or going off.

-Cubs B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You give two excellent and specific suggestions that would make YGC better: Allow longer phone calls and allow youngsters to stand at their windows. (We don't know why there is a rule against that, and we know that if we were locked up, that's where we'd be standing, too.) But even more important than your advice to the hall is your acknowledgment that you have learned an important survival skill: patience. Now that you've learned how to control your reactions to things (for fear of catching another case), you can apply this new skill on the outside and avoid many potential problems.

San Mateo System

In this system the DA, judge, and POs are quick to give us years like candy. Sending us to YAs and treating us like adults. They call all of this rehabilitation, and therapeutic — us away from our loved ones, from our education, from our sports. Thinking that giving us time will make us a civilized person.

There has been changes in my life since my incarceration. I learned a lot more of everything, from negative to positive. Mr. Lynch, Mr. Tolo, and Mr. Quesada, they've helped me with education. They also helped me see the real life outside the gang life style. I send them all my love and respect. This is my last time messing up.

This system people call it "haters," "shady," and whatever they say, I just push, pull, and strive, keep my head up high, and I shine like the brightest star. Sometimes people need to take initiative for their own actions. You people complaining about this system, make a difference then!

-Boxer, San Mateo

From The Beat: It's not only nice to read that some staff in the Hall have gone out of their way to help, but that their help has made a difference in your life. We hope they know how you feel. What other things could have helped you, especially before you got here? When you tell the complainers to "make a difference," what do you have in mind. What kind of a difference will you make?

Who I've Turned Out To Be

I could only say how the system is so messed up but I dare not end it there because it wouldn't be enough I'm constantly reminded of how I'm here because I acted like a fool

but if I make a noise in the Hall, you have the power to allow me not to go to school!

Have you ever walked, talked, or lived a day in my shoes? It's obvious you haven't by your cruel and unusual rules You call me out in a crowd and try your hardest to make me look bad

I called you out your name, you're embarrassed and now I'm in this unit, mad

But there are some of you who actually seem to care in your words of wisdom, and if I need that support you seem to be there

I dare not go on without a thank you! to those to which it applies

as I walk out admissions with a possible hug or goodbye

But back to the ones who seem to be on power trips your point isn't being crossed, instead it's my spirit that's being ripped

I've gained nothing out of being here besides life goes on sucking up all the harsh treatment I endure, knowing one day I'll be home

Job well done! You've accomplished your duties and have made me see

I'm completely ashamed of who I've turned out to be

-Star, San Mateo

From The Beat: If they've truly made you ashamed of who you've turned out to be — a young woman who's clearly able to see things as they are, to write a fluid and deep poem, to engage in discussion with both peers and staff during our workshop — then they've imposed a punishment far greater than incarceration. It's a sign of your maturity and understanding that you're able to recognize those who are helping you through your time, as well as criticizing those who make it more difficult. How will you keep your sense of self-worth as you continue to face those who will seek to put you down? What will it take for you recognize that the core of who you are is something they can't touch unless you let them? How can you keep your spirit strong through the adversity?

Cold Game And The System

As a person in this messed up system in the state of California, I would like to tell Mr. Governor to make some changes.

I think instead of us being treated like animals, we should be treated more like human beings. Yes, I understand that we have messed up here and there. That's the way people learn from their mistakes. I believe that nobody in God's green earth is perfect.

I think to make the system work for juveniles is to give us job trades, like how to be a mechanic or a carpenter, or something like that. I think that will work because when we have the chance to touch down, we got something to look forward to when we're out.

This system is corrupted with all these two-faced judges and POs, and shhh. Like me, right now, I'm going to court and I have to fight some charges that I didn't do. You can see that it was not me, but these two-face DAs are trying to hang me for this shhh.

My PO is accusing me if doing it, and she doesn't listen to me. It's like they just want me, and hundreds like me, washed up in this cold system.

Now if everything I said matters to you top people wit' power, please help me and hundreds like me, and change this because we're human just like you...

I think it's time to make a change in the juvenile system. They call us the snakes, but on the one, they the ones eating the youth like snakes. They think there's no hope in the youth in the future.

-Juicy-Loo B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We find two excellent suggestions for the system in your piece. First, the idea that you should get practical job training while you're sitting on ice in the hall is a great one. We agree that one of the things that brings people back here over and over again is there inability to get meaningful work on the outside. Learning a trade would help to solve that problem. But you also make a more general observation — one we've heard many times — and that is that those in authority don't really listen to you and your peers. We have seen that unwillingness to listen ourselves (and we've seen it both among staff and your peers...), and we also believe that a little respectful listening, on all sides, would do a world of good in the system. Thanks for spitting knowledge our way. Keep it up.

When Will It End?

When will it end — all the killing, stealing, and dope dealing? I know it's hectic out here in the streets of Oakland, but if we all do what needs to be done, and come as one, then we all could reunite and stop the fighting.

I hate having to watch over my shoulder every time I walk down the street or driving down the block. I can't wait until it all ends, then maybe we'll be able to spend more time having parties without violence or without going to jail. I can't wait until it all ends.

-Lil' Kev, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is a very simple thing to ask for, peace, but it's so hard to get in the streets of Oakland. How can you take your life into your own hands, Lil' Kev? If you can't move, how can you stay focused and strong and not do what everyone else is doing? Get the support you need. There are many programs out there, including ours.

Juvenile Justice System

The juvenile justice system of Alameda County is messed up. They trying to lock young people up when what they really need is help. A majority of the people that go to the hall just need some foundation and direction in their life. They don't need to be locked up in group homes, camp or the CYA, where all they do is grow angry and lose hope for the future because all they see is jail cells and prison conditioning.

They put some of the money that they use to punish us, to help us. They wouldn't need to build new juvenile halls and prisons. Instead of telling us that we can't make it in life and why we can't, they should be telling us that we can make it and how. To get help, you gotta want help so the DAs and such can always say that we don't change 'cause we don't want to, but to want help you gotta know that there is help. So programs and mentoring that instill in us goals and ways to reach them couldn't hurt.

The bottom line is the system been messed up forever but it could start to change today.

-Lil' Torre, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Very well written and thought out. You recommend some very possible ideas — so thoughtful that we can see you helping juveniles in the future get the help and direction they need. Since you know that there are options out there, what are you going to do? How can you stay away from the old life enough so that you can start looking at freedom, success and more happiness?

The System Is A Money Maker

The system isn't here to help you, it's only here to make money. Excuse my French, but the system don't give a shhh about you. The PO, DA, PD, judge and peace officers all get their paychecks signed by the same person. When someone gets released, that means less money in the bank.

I don't think a lot of judges care if you're innocent or guilty. A lot feel like, "Well, if you came in here for it, you must be guilty." So, even if they don't have anything, the odds are against you. Also, the judge and DA are working together because before you go into the courtroom, they're talking about if you committed the crime, and what should they do with you. The same people go out to lunch, golfing, and all dat other good stuff.

Now, criminals shouldn't be given sympathy all the time, but if this is juvenile hall Youth Guidance Center, they're supposed to be helping you become a better person, but it seems like the only place they're guiding you is to prison. Think about it.

-Afro B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You make some excellent points in this piece, Afro. We can see how it looks like all those people are "in it together" because they do play together, talk together, socialize together — and mostly get their money from the same source. But we have known some very dedicated PDs and POs who work for their clients, so we can't condemn them all. Also, the idea that they want you in the system because you are money in the bank may be true, but we don't think they have to worry much about that. There will always be enough young people in the system to make sure they have jobs. Now that you've been in YGC for a minute, what specific suggestions do you have for the hall that would make your life easier, that would give you and your peers a better shot at living productively and positively in freedom?

Now, criminals shouldn't be given sympathy all the time, but if this is juvenile hall Youth Guidance Center, they're supposed to be helping you

THE SYSTEM

Co-Pieces Of the Week

My Pain About The System

My pain. My pain. Time and time again I wish it was a better way. From being in the system, sometimes I think about things very much and long and just to have been in the justice system, things have really changed. Judges are putting the young youth away for a long time away from my family and friends, mothers, father, sisters and brothers.

But we tend to put our self in the position to have to go through right and wrong but some learn and some don't. But the main thing is that some don't learn from they mistakes. That's why judges and PO's have to do what they have to do just to keep they jobs and careers for they families and things.

It's they young people that don't do the right thing. So what's left to do but put them away 'cause they choose to not handle the life and they future. So they feel like only the bad happens, but much good will come if you live for the good instead of the bad and what you can get right now.

The world would be a wonderful place, like Oakland, to raise your kids and have a family but things will never change the way it's going now. We up to the twenty-fifth death, and I hate to say it but it's one of my blood cousin' that's gone and no longer coming back.

We just need to take heed to what's going on around us and our life because life is long but always remember one thing, death is forever. And one more thing, God bless every body and live long because tomorrow is not promised. Amen.

-Ky, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is a very serious subject you write about. We hope you will re-read what you have written here and remember your own advice. How can one take heed? You can't be careful if you decide to do the same type of things. Tomorrow isn't promised but you can increase your chances at a good long life. What are you going to do differently? How can you get help on your needs? We wish that you will have a family and raise kids one day too. Maybe it means you got get out of Oakland by any means necessary. You deserve a good life. Doesn't everyone?

Too Many Tear Drops

Too many tears drop from too many mothers' and fathers' eyes.

Too many die young and too many fall victim to a gun, Too many would rather run from their problems, than admit they really have one.

Too many would rather use drugs and claim that they are thugs than be in love.

Too many would rather push and shove than give someone a true hug.

Too many people would rather shout and fight.

Too many end up losing the best things they ever had.

-Edwin, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You fill these lines up hard with the sadness of the senseless violence and the thug life. How are you trying not to be a part of all this? It's no longer about who is hard, it's about who is hateful and lost. It's no longer about the brotherhood and fun times, it's about people dying and wasting their lives. Did you lose the best thing you ever had? Can you get your life back? Find enough courage to get help if you need it.

That's why judges and PO's have to do what they have to do just to keep they jobs and careers for they families and things.

Change The System

The one practical thing you would change about the system is the system changed from rehabilitation to corrections. The children need tools to change, minors are not getting the support here to adjust in their new or old environment they are going into. They are not prepared to fit into society to function at a level to become successful.

They are setting themselves up and this system is set up to be a revolving door for minors in CYA. Children are placed in gangs to survive inside of this system and they were not previously a gang member.

These children have so many issues that are not being addressed they have no choice but to continue in their insanity change this system and give the children the mental, physical, financial freedom to environments conducive to the child well-being

-Marcella, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You make a strong point here. It seems like the System has focused on the punishment, rather than preparing youth for their future. How do you think the System can better prepare youth for the outs? If you were in charge, what would you change?

The thing I really do like about being incarcerated is the food we get and the amount of food we get.

Wrongly Accused 'Cause Of Reputation

I'm writing about the system. First I want to talk about the district attorney. They need to start thinking about what they do when they tell the judge what they want to happen. Like when people steal or sell stuff, it's most likely because they need money. In some ways being locked up changed me a little bit, like the way I think about the stuff I do. The thing I really do like about being incarcerated is the food we get and the amount of food we get.

I don't think you get a second chance. Once you get locked up, you most likely coming back, and sometimes it's because of the person, but it most likely because he/she needs money. Maybe if they provided a job or some legal way to make money. Like for me, I'm here 'cause I need money.

I was in trouble for something I did not do, and that was rob a house. I had a job when this robbery happened. I was also at work. Well I was walking to turn in a application for another job when a cop looks at me and pulls over and tells me to stop. I do because I thought I had nothing to worry about. He asked me if I had any stolen property at my house. I said no. He and some other cops did not find anything. But they still said I did it and took me to JH and they sent me to camp for something I did not do.

So if the system would have not looked at my background and still believed that I'm the same person, I would not be here. So to me, I'm say "F" the system and who ever runs it.

-Street Dreamer, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We left that last part because you thoroughly explained why you are angry at the system. You also make a very good suggestion that the system could help more in providing jobs to young people who really need the money. Too many times, hustlers need some money but make hella money and get greedy and buy so many material things. Did you ever overdo it? You state your case, and we understand you needed money but isn't there other ways to get financial assistance? Welfare and food stamps don't sound great but if you can manage like this while you finish your education and look for a job, you won't have to live like that all your life. What is up with your parent(s)/guardian(s)? If you need assistance with family life, please ask for it until you get it.

One More Chance

One thing I would love to change about the system is when they keep putting off my court dates every month and a half.

Also, I don't think it is fair when the court's decide to trial me as an adult.

I think the judge needs to sit down with me and talk to me and get her own perspective, instead of listening to what the D-A thinks about me, or what the cops think.

I think that the only person that has helped me in the corrupt system is our counselor, Mr. Battle. He devotes his time to counsel us, so we learn from our mistakes. He tries his hardest to make this place stress free.

The system could have handled my situation better, by giving me a chance, since this is my first crime and not trying me as an adult.

They system has helped me by making me realize that I need to change my life, but the system is hurting me now because they don't want to give me a second chance.

The system did live up to the hype when my friends told me they screw peoples lives over.

One thing I don't like about being incarcerated is that I feel lonely and I feel like my voice is not being heard. I would teach people about the system when I get out that they don't play no more.

One practical thing I would change is that the judge sits down and talks to me and knows me for who I am not what the D-A thinks.

Second chances end when someone keeps getting locked up, the system should try not to figure out what's wrong at that point if the person might need medical or psychological help.

When people are incarcerated the words that come to mind are like chained up and not free to have a voice.

I think my punishment is cruel and not fair because this is my first offensive and all I want is a second chance at life.

Incarceration has changed me a lot I'm more into my religion now, I won't ever break a single law again.

If a family member is going to enter the system I would tell them it's no joke and they should learn from their experience and pray to Allah. I have discovered alot about myself, that I never knew about, like how much I could change and how it's so easy to change.

I would tell the governor just give me a second chance, I bet my life I won't mess up again. I think the D-A talks to the judge about giving us longer sentences.

Peace to all my homies in Rita, the pen and the Hall, keep praying because Allah hears all our prayers.

-Abbas, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Of course you feel lonely, but you must believe that your voice is ringing loud and clear to the many, many readers of The Beat Within. Each week Abbas you not only touch your peers through the written word, you are touching a huge community of readers who are also free. Continue to step up and teach. Use The Beat as your soapbox! Educate us, use us to spread the word!

Stop Sending Kids to CYA!

If I could change the system I would stop sending kids in Alameda County to CYA, because it's all over the news and the news papers. Just last week one of the counselors here told us that it was these boys that are in CYA, and two guards kicked one of the boys in the face about 15 times!

Now that's messed up, how we get in a little trouble and they send us to CYA like that's like sending us to the baby pen.

I know that I messed up, but we shouldn't have to go through this getting kicked in the face by another man. This is not right and I don't respect that!

So to The Beat readers, man, just don't end up like me goin' to CYA for 18 months! Keep yo' head up and I'll see you when I see you and I read you when I read you. Always and forever yo' friend big Kenny Ken, peace out.

Oh yeah I forgot, you got to think if people sending kids to CYA and they know what's going on in there, why do they send us kids to places like this to learn a lesson? Why would they send us to a place were they know that the guards are kicking kids in the face? So that shows to me you that yo' PO and the judge and the D-A don't care about you. To me they all (the system) wants to see us locked up.

Man, please for me, stay out of jail because the system don't care about us, all they care about is that money, money, money and that's on the real.

-Big Kenny Ken, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We really appreciate your compassionate and truthful response after hearing what's going on in YA. However, we must tell you the truth about what went on, so you could be better informed. Two youth got beaten in that incident. One was hit in the face twenty-eight times while the other got kicked in the face. Both kids were not resisting at the time of the beating. With that said, how will you avoid the negative things that go on in YA, so you can make some positive changes in preparation for your release? How will you look past all the violence so you can come out on top in the end? The Beat has connections with support groups across the Bay Area, so if you (and your family) need help when you get out, please contact The Beat. In the meantime keep hitting us with these thoughtful pieces.

A Rip Off

I think the system is a rip off of young peoples lives. I was reading this book of world records and California has the most prisons and inmates.

If I were Governor Arnold I would stop locking people up for petty crimes and trying to turn them into something big when it's really not.

There are only a couple counselors that really try to help us. Like T. Brown, T. Dikes, Washington, and Foster. All the rest of the counselors be doubting us and telling us we're going to come right back.

This system isn't doing anything but hurting my family and I. In Juvenile Hall I don't like the fact that they can do anything with you when they want to. It doesn't make any sense to write a grievance, because that doesn't do anything.

Being incarcerated didn't teach me anything but, "Other people can care less how I feel or how my family feels." I got cheated out of my freedom by the judge, so I think it's only fair that they get cheated out of their jobs. I think it's a sin to judge people, only God can judge me.

-Bo Birch Boy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Heartfelt writing. Do you feel that the punishment you were given fit the crime you were accused of? If you could change a few things about the system, what would they be? What do you think can be done to make the system work better for you and others?

I got cheated out of my freedom by the judge



Here

I don't want to be here,
I don't want to live in fear.
What am I suppose to do,
I am supposed to live life and make it through.
I know for sure when I get out,
I'm not going to take that wrong route.
Just being here for the first time,
Made want to go crazy and lose my mind.
I know I'm not going to be here for long,
So when I get out, I won't come back and won't do wrong.

-Ryde Or Dye Chick, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Nice flow! All the best when you return home.



System

I think your PO, the DA, and the judge make their decisions of what it says in black and white, they only look at your negative side and pretend not to see nothing on your positive, that's how they judge you.

The system messes a lot of people up even me, you, your friend, your cousin, anybody you can think of. I got one example, when I got transferred with my homeboy, I was going from San Mateo to Alameda and he was going to YGC. They told him in court he's going to YGC. I was with him, they took him to Coco County and he had a couple days till he was 18 years old and it takes two weeks for him to get transferred and go to court, now he's going to prison.

-Rudy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What can be done to improve some things about the system? Do you feel like they handled your own case well? What do you think are the harshest conditions of the system? And if you could change one thing about the system, what would that be?

My Life On Probation

Well let me tell you about my life when I got on probation. That's when my life got messed up because at first I would just smoke, but when I got on probation I started using other drugs.

But I could say that the system helped me better myself in my reading and writing skills. And I also think that all the laws should be the same in every city. The only thing that I can say is don't commit crimes 'cause you will pay for it and that's all real talk. One love, one heart.

-Sonny, Napa

From The Beat: Why did you start using more drugs after you got on probation? Were you stressing? It's good that you at least took advantage and helped yourself out on learning more reading and writing skills. If you could change one thing about the system, what would it be?

Wasted Time In The Juvenile System

All this time I wasted in this juvenile system. All they do is waste your time. All the time you wasted you could be doing many things on the outs.

Something that the system should change is for us to be able to see our family. It is good when your mom or sister come and see you because it's been a long time since you've seen your sisters and brothers. That is some thinking they should change in this system: let all your family see you.

This system is hard because of being in your rooms all day, seeing the same walls, thinking what to do when you get out. Then it's hard because there's some haters that try to hate. You have to take it, and you just want to fight them. That is the hard thing in the Hall, getting a 24 just fighting these haters.

The other thing is taking shhh from staff, because some don't like you and you don't like them.

-Saul, San Mateo

From The Beat: We like your suggestion that your entire family, including young brothers and sisters, should be allowed to visit. Besides that, though, can you think of anything else that could help young people, either while they're locked up or before and after they come here, to live productive lives? In particular, is there anything that might have helped you before you got here?

Yo Quiero Hablar Sobre El Sistema

Yo quiero hablar sobre el sistema, por ejemplo en que estoy aqui. Estoy aqui porque violé mi probación y me estan acusando de un asalto de arma de fuego, y eso no fue así.

Esta es mi historia. Yo soy de la Mission. Yo siempre ando con mi fasca. En esa noche estaba con mi jaina, estabamos comiendo en a taquería que queda en la Mission, en eso cruso uno de unos de homies, me llamó, salió afuera de la taquería cuando me pare con el, llegaron la chota, y nos arrestó.

Yo no sabía lo que él había hecho, y cuando me revisó me encontré mi cuete. Ahora, me van a mandar a CYA en la pinta y ante de eso yo estaba en el Rancho. Yo salí el 12 de Diciembre del 2003 Ahora voy para CYA. Bueno espero que se pongan las pilas.

From The Beat: Que mala suerte amigo, sabías que estas adentro porque así lo haz querido, si tú hubieras pensado bien las cosas, no estuvieras en manos del sistema, y el sistema no te estuviera mandando a los lugares que has ido o irás. Piensa bien als cosas amigo, si en verdad quieres dar tu libertad y tu vida por tu barrio.

I Want To Talk About The System

I want to talk about the system, for example, the one I'm in right now. I'm in here because I violated my probation and I'm being accused of assault with a deadly weapon, but it did not go down like that.

This is my story. I'm from the Mission. Everywhere that I go, I'm always strapped with my gun. On that fateful night I was with my female. We were dining at a taqueria in the Mission. While we were eating, one of my homies rolled by and he saw me. He hollered at me and I stepped outside to say what's up with him. When I approached him, some cops rolled by and arrested us.

I had no idea what he had done and when they searched me, they found my weapon. Now they are going to send me to CYA, but before they do that, I'm served time at the Ranch. I got out on December 12th, 2003. Now I am going to CYA. Well, I hope everyone who's locked up learns from this experience and wishes up for the future.

-Lil' Droopy

El Sistema

Mi Nombre es Jose y vivo en California. Soy de Mexico. No tengo a nadie y seré deportado a México en unas semanas.

Lo que no me gusta del sistema es estar enserrado, que me regañen y que me digan cosa. Como yo no hablo Inglés, a veces no le entiendo y pierdo puntos y me encierran en mi cuarto y ahí como y estoy encerrado todo el día sin hacer nada. También todos los días llamo a mi PO y nunca vienen.

From The Beat: Amigo, son las reglas, así es como ellos castigan a los muchachos para que uno no llegue a volver a esos lugares. Esperamos que te vaya bien sea donde sea que te manden. Cuidate y no dejes vencer por las cosas malas.

The System

My name is Jose and I live in California. I'm from Mexico. I don't have anyone here in the States and in a few weeks I will be getting deported back to Mexico.

What I do not like about the system is the actual being locked up part of it. Also, when I get scolded and when they say things to me. Since I do not speak English, sometimes I do not understand what they are telling me and I lose points because of that, so they lock me up in my room. Sometimes I stay locked up in my room all day. Also, every day I call my PO and he never comes.

-José, Marin

They treat us like they're training puppies

Reality

Staff say they're not shady. They say if you mess up someone else might do the same thing. So they have to smash on us to make a point. They treat us like they're training puppies — tuck our shirts in, pull our pants up, don't talk, and don't ask questions. How can they say don't ask them anything if we have to ask for everything?

People say that staff go on power trips and they have power over them, but to me, they don't got shhh but keys. They should give us something to look forward to, like family visits, home passes, and special programs.

People ask for a lot of things, but I think the more you dream the harder your time will be. People should just face reality and get over it. Don't look at the bad side, look at the good part. Like if you got sent down, just think I got more time to work out, or I could finish my book.

-A-Dog, San Mateo

From The Beat: Welcome back to the pages of The Beat, A-Dog. We've heard staff say similar things — that they have to train you, discipline you (we've even heard one add, "like animals"). Why do you think they feel they have to treat you like animals? How do you, and your peers, react to being treated like animals? What are the special programs you'd like to see? What kind of family visits would you like to see? How do you manage to stay so cool and to always look at the good side of things?

Time To Calm Down

Dialogue Between Black Jack and Anthony

Anthony: Hey Black, wake up!

Black Jack: What? Whoever that is talkin', better shut up 'for I woop ya butt.

Anthony: Who you think you is? What? You better stop talkin' to me like I'm some kind of kid.

Black Jack: What this Mc Mod, son?

Watch who you talkin' to!

Anthony: You don't know who this is, Black?

Black Jack: But I'm a find out who this is, Jack!

Anthony: I'm a tell you who I am! You!

Black Jack: What you mean, me, foo'?

Anthony: I'm you before you was Black Jack, man!

Black Jack: Ay, on da Mod, you better quit playin'.

Anthony: It's for real. I need to talk to you.

Black Jack: I feel crazy talkin' to myself,

but I'm in ma cell and nobody will know.

Anthony: So a you need to straighten up and quit thinkin' it's thug for life.

Black Jack: Listen, that's all I know —

thugs and gangstaz Ant, all right!

Anthony: But, Black, you ain't in the 'hood no mo'.

Black Jack: I hear you,

but I'm a do what I got to do not to be broke.

Anthony: But you settin' a bad example for our lil' brotha KG. He in here with us right now.

Black Jack: And that's my fault, how?

Anthony: 'Cause he was like you

and didn't want to go to school.

Black Jack: Damn, all that you sayin' is makin' me feel bad, 'cause it's true.

Anthony: Now we gone get out and get us and lil' bro back on the right track.

Black Jack: That's coo'. I'm down and with that.

Anthony: That's what I'm talkin' about, Black.

We fin' to do the damn thang.

Black Jack: I'm in a new town. I'm a start a new life,

but I ain't gone change all our ways.

Anthony: I know you ain't gone' stop thuggin', but you can stop lookin' for trouble.

Black Jack: I'm a make money legit and not get off them bundles.

Anthony: That's it, Black. I heard the staff keys.

Black Jack: You want me to go straight? Why you talkin' about drugs, Anthony?

Anthony: You know I was talking about the keys to the door, man!

-Black Jack and Anthony, Marin

From The Beat: Now that you've had this conversation with your other self, do you think that you can catch up with him before he leaves you? Do you feel that you're destined to keep thuggin' and going in and out of Juvy? If so, why? Is that decision up to you or up to some other force in the universe? If you wanted to stop hangin' in the streets, could you? What would motivate you to build yourself another life? Or what would push you out of the lives you live now, that keep bringing you back inside? How else can you make some cash, legit? What really keeps you going back to the streets, when you're on the outs? What would get you to get out the game and stay out?

What I do not like about the system is the actual being locked up part of it.



Visitation

I'm only concerned about one issue in the system, and that is the rules and regulations of visitation. I feel that these rules are very unlawful due to the fact that we have less than a half hour with our parents. We only get to see them twice a week at inconvenient times. When we would be in our rooms for eighteen to twenty hours a day, to only see your mom for just thirty minutes isn't enough.

Also, I'm upset at the fact I'm not able to see my family at all because I have an older sister and I'ma miss her eighteenth birthday and graduation. I got a little sister and a little brother who I dearly miss and want to see. If I were to see my family it would ease a lot of stress and anger.

So I feel the system should take in consideration to at least allow us to see our family.

-Lim, San Mateo

From The Beat: You give a well-reasoned explanation of why you'd like to see the visitation rules changed. Why do you think those rules are in place? Why do you think they limit visits to thirty minutes, twice a week, and only with parents or guardians, not brothers and sisters and the rest of the family?

To My Little Sister

Hey lil' sis! As you know this is my second time in here! My first should have been my last. Yet me being in here opened my eyes to how much I was hurting my family mom, dad, bros and sisters. Getting locked up showed me how many people actually care about me! Friends and family! I ain't no screw up!

I'm here in life for a reason. This life we live is lent to us. He can take it from us any moment he wishes to! So lil' sis take advantage of everyday — live it up! I love you! Keep it clean! Don't take anything for granted. God bless you. Always your sis,

-Carmen, Napa

From The Beat: We already know that you ain't no screw up! That's some good advice to your sister! Are you gonna do the same? When you get out, do you think about spending more time with your sister, and setting a good example? She's more likely to listen to you if you're practicing what you preach.

The Hell System

The system to me is BS 'cause we get treated bad just 'cause of small things. Plus, there are staff that work here that love to hate on you.

I know some that have problems with their life. They blame it on us, so we get treated like dirt, like if there is no one who believes in us. And the rooms are too small, plus I think we should get a desk with pens, a notebook and everything so we won't be stressing and hoo-riding.

The system is worthless — they love to hate. Plus every judge I seen is white. I have never seen a black or Mexican judge. No one knows if the judges are racist or just don't care about kids.

But there are good things in here. Being in here keeps us sober and helps us to control our anger. Also, there are cool staff who care and do stuff for us, but it's worse stuff I prefer to talk about.

If we get desks with notebooks and pens, and see our family like three or four times a week and get treated fair. That's how I feel about the hell system.

-Spooky, San Mateo

From The Beat: We feel much of what you have to say here. How would you respond to folk who worry that pens would be used for weapons or for tattoos? Why do you think there aren't any judges of color? How can you take the good things about being in the Hall — especially the sobriety and ways you learn to control your anger — with you when you leave the Hall, whether it's to another placement or back to the free world?

Life Is Shady

Man, it's the staff. The way they treat us is like we dogs or convicts. I would treat everybody fair. Help each and every kid. I wouldn't pick on the kids just because I want to.

I mean, I would have one day with just counseling, just talking to the kids. I would give them more time outside of thier rooms, because they're in there 12-13 hours every day, and every day you're just sitting there looking at graffiti or reading a book. I'd let them play games or have free time.

Like my PO, he doesn't like me, because the first time we had a meeting, he wanted me to say what he wanted me to say. He wasn't listening. So I was telling him my story, and then he'd say, "so after you did that, you did . . ." which I didn't do. Man, this is whack what I'm going though. I just want to do the time and live my life. This is why life is shady.

-David B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We're sure other Beat readers will feel you on POs not listening and feeling like the staff isn't being fair. Is this a new PO or just someone who never seems to listen? Do you have any ideas about how to build a better relationship with your PO since he can have such a big impact on your life?

We just need more cooperation and support.

Can't Hate All The Time

The system is mixed up but at times it's good. You can't just hate on them all the time 'cause you don't like being locked up — sometimes you deserve it without even realizing it. But the times you are locked up for no reason isn't right, and then facilities complain because there's too many people in the jails.

Sometimes the judges will sentence you a long time for some petty shhh, and the people who did hard crimes, they send the minors somewhere they're not ready to be. But that's just the judges' point of view.

The staff in this juvenile hall are coo', but sometimes they take things out of proportion and give you room time, which is no problem, but sometimes you get it for no reason. There's a few staff who will be coo' with you and take their time and listen to you and try their best to help you with their problems, and the others are so quick to not even hear you out and just send you down. We just need more cooperation and support.

-Gordita, San Mateo

From The Beat: Well broken down, Gordita. What's the difference between staff who will listen to you and help you out versus those who are quick to give you room time? What do you think stops some staff from giving your the cooperation and support you need? For those minors who have committed serious crimes, where should they be sent? What kind of incarceration should exist for those youth who are convicted of violent crimes?

The Real System

The system is there to help you, although sometimes we think that it is there to just crumble us up and throw us away.

They say that it's there to rehabilitate us, but they bring us to court and pass our case by. They see their job as a job but really if that is how they see it they really need to find a different profession. They system is taking our lives as a passerby.

In a way, the system has been there to help me, but then again each time I build my faith back up for it they let me down. My case was minor and without even looking it through, seeing what could have helped me, they sent me to CYA. For people that know me, I'm not CYA material. People thought I was joking when I told them that that was where I was going.

Without naming names, I must say that judges who take things to the heart need to learn not to do that. For example, if we keep coming back, don't think that we are doing it to hurt you. We are doing it because most of the time that's all we know.

Being sent to jail so many times, has, however, helped me. It has made me think about the most important things in life — what I want to do in my life and how I need to accomplish my goals. Being in here has helped me: I have registered for college — I'm starting next semester — so I can't really downgrade the system because it has helped me. I am a better person.

In Santa Clara County or Sacramento (I'm not sure which) I believe that your parents have a say in your sentence. They are able to tell the judge what they think will work for their children. That is a great way to do it. Our parents know us better than anyone else, and they probably would know what would work. They also want the best for us.

So in a way the system does help, but only if you are willing to be helped.

-Ginger, San Mateo

From The Beat: We appreciate that you go beyond the surface level with this response, avoiding the temptation to say "the system sucks" — or even "the system's great" — by going deeper to give the good and the bad. Why do you think so many in the system aren't more concerned with your feelings as you go through your case? If you were a lawyer or a judge, how would you make sure the youth you're working with were informed and kept involved in the process? Also, we feel you when you say you're not CYA material, but who is? What does it take to make someone CYA material? What do you think your parents would have recommended in your case (we're not sure about Sacramento, but we can tell you that from our experience working with youth in Santa Clara that their parents have no say in their sentences)?

**I got love for everyone that can
get off probation without hassle,
'cause I sure as hell can't.**

Locked Behind These Walls

It feels like when I'm locked up in these walls, it's like they close in on me, and it feels like I'm going to fall. I feel like screaming 'cause I can't even open my door. I would love to be out of the system and just go home even though I ain't got that much, 'cause I'm hella poor. Being in this place is tearing me up from the inside to the outside.

I didn't go to court, so they gave me a warrant. I knew I couldn't hide, I'm scared that if I'm in here too long I'm going to lose my mind. I'm stuck in here with a stupid violation and a warrant.

Well, screw it, I'm just going to do my time, and stop complaining. I got love for everyone that can get off probation without hassle, 'cause I sure as hell can't.

-Backtrack B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Good, honest piece. Why do you feel it is such a hassle to get off probation? What do you need to change to make it out of this trap? Since you already knew how it felt to be in the Halls, why did you let yourself miss court?

Not For, Not Against

I'm not really for the system, but I'm not against it. We make the system. We make the system and the laws. The government makes up rules and laws for us to abide by because we do certain things. They have to make laws for us. We put them in a situation to put laws out there, to stop the conspiracy.

I don't agree with some laws such as Prop 21 or three strikes. Yet they are there for a reason.

People say screw the system because they feel that the system is against them. That's like saying that everyone is against them. Regular people make up the system. Don't we vote on who's president? We vote for or against certain laws. We choose what's going to happen. We make the system.

One thing I'm really against is that there are laws that are for young adults under 18 and we don't get to vote. That's unfair.

I'm not so much against the system. They can't change me; I can only change myself. So I'm not for it and I'm not against.

-Aok, San Mateo

From The Beat: What part do you think you and your peers play in laws like Prop 21 and three strikes? You're correct when you say that they were enacted as law due to a popular vote, but you're also correct to say no one under eighteen was eligible to vote. What gives? Do you think that folk under eighteen should be exempt from laws that they aren't able to vote on? Is there something you feel strongly enough in the system to want to organize a movement to change it?

The System Has Helped

What I would change about the system is a little more time away from our room, and family being able to visit you more often.

The person who really helped me out in these type of system would be Omega Boys and Girls club that speak out for the younger ones.

The system could've really supported me with more programs that could have helped me while I'm at home doing probation, than being sent somewhere else.

The system has really helped me through the times I've been locked up, as in thinking before acting and learning to control my anger. By helping me out, the system makes you know the consequences from doing what you want to do, like fight. So you learn not to take action and hold in your temper.

Before I experienced the system, people spread lots of rumors as in perverted people and the torture in jail, but it came out to be totally different.

-Vietnamese B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: How much more should parents be allowed to visit? Would you ever go speak out at Omega? What would you say? What type of programs should the system be offering while you are at home? Why do you think some kids don't see that going to The Halls can actually help — and don't change their ways after they've experienced it?





The System Need' A Makeover

What would I change about the system? One is the food because they feed us like animals. Man, the food most of the times, it be uncooked and sometimes it's cold and just nasty, not something I will eat on the outs.

Another thing they need more of is clothes because the clothes are too small and at the bottom of most of the pants legs it be ripped. Oh yeah, the shirts be too small.

Third reason why they need to change in the county is the staff. They don't teach us nothing but yell at us. They just come to work for the money. They don't care about us. They don't put an effort and help us. That's why the system need' a makeover.

-Lee, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We appreciate your suggestions. That's not cool that the food is uncooked and the clothes are falling apart. You especially have the right to cooked food (you can get sick if it isn't cooked right.) Do you ever complain to someone of authority that will do something about it? Is there not one staff that is helpful? Do you have difficulty yourself being cool with staff? How can you work on that? You know you can't change them but you can be the bigger person. Good luck.

The System: Sometimes It's Fair, Sometimes It's Not

The way I feel about the system is that sometimes we get a fair trial and sometimes we don't.

For example, it depends where you do your crime and what you did. If you did a little crime like stole something from a store, you shouldn't get a lot of months or even get put on probation for that. That is not fair. But if you keep going in and out of jail, that's what's going to happen.

My case is a probation violation. I've been here for a couple of weeks for violating probation by smoking weed. My probation officer never pee tested me, but that day I had a bench warrant. Now he's trying to pee test me, put me on a ankle bracelet, have a curfew at 7:00 p.m., no smoking weed, and put me in a drug rehab program like I'm a weed head.

I ain't mad because I'm about to get out in a couple of days. Still I had to suggest most of that shhh just to freaking get out. I thank God for giving me the faith not to lose it and catch a new case for fighting or some other bullshhh.

Sometimes I feel like screw the system, but I put myself in this situation, so I can't really get mad.

-Young Gunna B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Should there be any penalty at all for stealing something from a store? Are you saying your PO wants you to jump through all these hoops because you pee tested dirty for marijuana? Do you think you need a drug rehab program? Do you think you might learn anything about yourself through such a program? Do you think you need to learn anything about yourself? We appreciate your thanking God for giving you faith to survive, but we wonder if the system itself could give something to young people to make it easier for them to survive. Can you think of anything?

**If you are in jail that is
a life opportunity that
will keep you as a slave**

Life And Freedom Are Valuable

What the system has done for me is helped me realize how valuable life is and how valuable freedom is. Freedom is so valuable to me now. When I get out I'm not going to bust a grape, not even kill a fly without wings because now I realize that no matter what you do, it will catch up to you sooner or later. And if it doesn't get you, somebody will kill you or hurt you really bad.

If you are in jail that is a life opportunity that will keep you as a slave, a legal slave. You might not realize it now but when you pay attention to what people do for just a phone call that you are going to eventually pay for.

-Raul, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You are so right that things have a way of coming back and being taken advantage of while you are locked up. When you start doing good things, remember you are still going to be faced with hard times. You may even ask, "what is the use of doing good if only bad is the award?" Your past may still be catching up to you or it's just a test. Pass it! If you aren't perfect, forgive yourself AND keep striving to be free and happy. Be courageous enough to ask for help when you need it too.

**Sometimes I feel like screw
the system, but I put myself
in this situation,
so I can't really get mad.**

Back In Focus

I'm in my room with two hours on my back
Doing time during 7 and 9

I ain't tripping though, two hours ain't shhh
I'll see the next day

All I need is this pencil and this pad
And everything will be okay

My mind is dozing off into something I call a fantasy
I see myself at home

Feeling like I'm on Ecstasy

Happy and proud, just knowing I'm at my own hizzy

Walkin' around

Doin' anything

Independently

Don't have to worry about anybody tellin' me to,

"Clean that up"

Or "dinner's at 5"

Or "bathroom's closed, you can't go pee."

Notice how these people are,

Lazy and selfish

Can't you see

It's nothing though, 'cause I ain't gotta worry about that any mo'

I ain't coming back and that's fa sho'!

"Roomie, are you lonely and sad in there?

I'm 'a come in after I'm done with Paris's hair."

There it goes

Her voice just knocked my fantasy out of my head

I look around and see four white walls

And me in bed

Not my bed

Someone else's

I realized,

She put me back in focus.

(dedicated to Lil' Joey)

-Jazze GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Good piece, Jazze, there's the writing we remember. It's like we're sitting in your cell creating our future with you. Do you try to limit your fantasy time and focus on what's in front of you? Are you imagining what Colorado will be like and what you'll do once you return?

My Life's Been A Struggle

My life has been a struggle, feeling like nobody cares ain't a joke. I can't believe the stress I've been through.

Livin' life alone without help has made me stronger. I can't dwell on what's been done. I hate the negativity in the world and knowing that no one can help. The system can't save nobody for shhh. They just tryin' to break you. Peeps in suits tellin' you what to do when they ain't never set foot in your life.

I've been on my own since I was a young teen living from house to house, sometimes not even having a home to go to. It kills me inside to know that you try and try but it just gets worse.

I can't say what's going to happen but what I choose to do. And that's the right thing. I can't depend on nobody but myself, and over the years I've found out I can't trust nobody if I can't trust the person that brought me into this world. Damn, life's a struggle.

-Xenia GU, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Man, Xenia, this piece breaks our hearts. It sure does suck to have a mother who just can't get herself together enough to be there for her child, but with that under your belt, we're hoping like hell you're wrong about things just getting worse. Has anyone or anything in the system been able to help your situation? What kinds of folks have you been to? You are a strong young woman to have made it this far, and if you keep on striving, someday we have to believe you'll get support you need. We wish you all the luck in the world, and if you think there's any way we could help, please let us know.

Make It Better

The one thing that I would change about the system is the way things are organized. I would make it more strict so that no one will ever want to come back here, they'll then think about their actions the next time that they want to commit a crime, 'cause it don't pay to be in trouble all the time.

There isn't anyone who works in the system who has helped me, but I'm looking forward to it 'cause it could mean the difference between me coming back here or being free in the society.

The system could have handled my situation better by giving me information about after school programs or something to keep me occupied, so I wouldn't have any time to get in trouble.

The system isn't helping me by locking me up for everything I do, instead of giving me a second chance and help me find a better way to handle certain situations to keep me out of trouble.

The system doesn't really live up to the hype that I heard about, I thought the system would help you to change your life instead of making it worse.

-Myron, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Sad commentary, yet very important. YOU would think that given all the adults that work in juvenile around the clock that at least one would make some type of impact on you. Well, if anything, we at The Beat want to push you to think about the choices you've made in your life, and maybe the best counselor is YOU! You have plenty of time to think and question when you are in your cell alone. When you get that chance o return home you must be that crusader that helps other young people realize that their is a better way to live than the way that brings you to places like jail. The best teacher sometimes is experience, and you now have that incarceration experience.

Messed Up Money Hungry System

The system is hella messed up because they always tryin' to wash you or trick you.

If you ever go down town and they askin' you questions, don't say nothin', 'cause it's always a trap. The system is tryin' to set you up. You can't ever trust nobody but yourself. They supposed to be tryin' to help you but they don't. You are nothin' but money in the system.

I hate bein' locked up because it's hella boring in here and if you don't know how to play the system you lose.

-Young Ace, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You're right about the set up part, but don't you think you also set yourself up to get played when you do the crime?

Change The System

The first thing I'll change about the system is the programs that's in it. I'll put money into educational tools, books, teachers and different programs to help people in the system. It really hasn't been too many people that have helped me but it's been a lot of staff that have gave us some game to make it in life. But it hasn't been a person yet in here that has told me or helped me on the outs since I've been in the system.

The system could have handled my situation better by letting me go. The system is definitely helping me because it's giving me time to think and plan how and what I want to do with my life. The system don't really live up to the hype. I've heard how it's rough and all that. I mean it's people that try to test you sometimes but if you hold your ground and handle yourself and be cool, you straight. So I say it don't in my eyes

Judging by the level I'm at, I don't like nothing about the system except that it gives you time to think about other things. It's very stressful and hard to stay focused being incarcerated. When I get out, I'll learn that it's not cool to be locked up and not to take advantage of my freedom.

-Markie, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It sounds like you would know how to handle a camp or group home. Have you ever thought about working to better the system or with kids when you get out and get a career? We are glad that you are taking the time to really look at your life and not letting the haters get to you. They are just in pain or in need of attention. What kind of things are you doing or could you do to make your time more productive and meaningful? Let us know how we can help you get situated.



In The System Or Six Feet Under?

I would want the system to stop sending people to the Y just for lil' things that they do.

In this system there are about ten to fifteen people that have helped me. The workers at juvenile hall and the POs — only some of them have helped me.

The system should have given me a chance again but no, they give me camp.

But I would like to say thank you because if

I was still out there, I maybe would be six feet down in the floor.

The system helped me and also hurt me because I can't be with my family every day but is ok. I want to say thank you.

-Lil' Thai, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We are glad that you are in camp if it keeps you safe. How will you maintain a safe and happy life when you get out? There is The Mentoring Center, The Beat Within, and other programs that could help you. Let us know if you want to know more.



ootin Thoughts

I just put the roota to the toota,
ya undastan' me!
High as a kite is where I wanna be.
It's a bird, it's a plane, No!
It's Keek!
He sure is high.
Damn skippy!
I feel like I am the sky.
Yurp, some freaks, and some hype, got me ready,
but too bad, I'm locked up
so there's no way for me to get a female.
I hit some push ups and let out some frustration,
because I wanna see a toned physique.
I look out my window at the 10 O'clock News,
damn theme song should be some blues,
all I hear is bad news,
SO WHAT'S NEW!?
I hate it here, the same thang ova and ova, shhh!
Am I in a coma?
Might as well be for the way the police beat me.
Swole and buised my head looked like a tumor,
I lost many nights of sleep, because no pillow could
contour to my head.
Back to the good, I wish I was in the hood,
at a fat ass party,
wit' a black, thick version of Barbie.
Now I'm stuck, and I know ya don't give a what!
so...I'm out!

-Keek, 150 Crew

From The Beat: After tuning your piece down, it still warrants being a "system" standout. We're honored to recognize your gift as a writer. We do hope you get the opportunity to utilize your tools as a student/teacher outside of this paper. You've been through plenty and we're sure the road ahead is still gonna be a bit bumpy. Don't forget The Beat and our desire to go along for the ride!

More Therapists And References!

If I could change one thing about the system it would be the lessons they teach in juvenile hall. I would change this because I don't think they teach us anything to help us not come back when we leave.

If it was up to me I would have life skills programs and more counseling besides, "it's no one's fault besides yours," and "what are you going to do to not to come back next time." I would have people like therapist workers be a counselor. I would also have more references to more places that help people who need help with school and emotional issues.

There are many more things I would change about the system, but for now that's all I'll say.

-Edwin, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Great suggestions! The common saying you mention about it being only your fault is completely one sided. You are still a young teen. Many of the things that have happened to you are NO fault of yours. These experiences have made you what you are today. Try to use your circumstances as reasons NOT excuses, so you can understand and change your situation. Ultimately, how you behave now is up to you because you are growing up. We can provide you with resources. Give us a call if you need to.

Out Of Our Environment

I think the system is all messed up for us teenagers because they put us in placements where they know we are going to run from. I think they do that because they want us to fail their programs so we can come back to jail, and so they can make money off of us being locked up.

And when we ask them to put us somewhere or someplace that will help us or where we can do good, they just say to put us somewhere hella far away because they think that we can't do or go around the area we live at. But when most of us turn eighteen years old, we are going to go back to the place where we live anyway.

And if they take us out of our environment, how are we going to do good when we go back home if we have not been living there and have not learned to do good there or deal with the problems around there?

-Sleepy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is a very good argument. It seems like the easy way to deal with a juvenile is take them out of the environment they messed up in but that can be short sighted like you said. Do you sometimes think that a young person does need to get away for a little bit to see something different and think about their life? How can you have a strong enough mind to not let your peers influence you to do dirt?

Thoughts And Camp Recommendations

The thing I would change about the system is how many days and hours you get for home visit. We should be at home on Tuesday to Sunday and check in on Mondays then go back home.

Not one but a lot of staff has helped me while I was in the system. The system could of handled my situation better by just giving me a straight release.

The system is helping correct my wrongs in life.

I don't like asking staff to go to the bathroom, I want to be able to go when I want to without permission.

To me, we don't get a second chance 'cause I didn't.

It's my first time being in the system and I'm doing five months at camp.

I think by the system sending me to camp, it was a fair deal 'cause they could of sent me to the Y.

Incarceration has changed me a lot. I have had a lot of time to think of my mistakes and what I need to do to straighten my life.

If one of my friends were to enter the system I would tell them to listen to staff, don't complain, just do your program, get out, and don't come back.

-Peanut, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Very straightforward and thoughtful! We would like for you to share what you are doing to straighten your life. You look at the bright side of things that you can't control. That's wonderful. You mention that you wish you got a straight release but then you mentioned you learned and changed. So do you still wish you had been released?

Lost

As I sit here looking at these four walls, listen to my silent tears of pain. Coming to realize what a horrible person I've become.

I can never win. I feel that I'm loosing strength becoming not strong enough to wake up every morning looking at these stupid broads. To live this way, hoping one day I can see, to live a brighter day. I do.

Will there be a change? Can I truly overcome all this pain? I appear to be cool on the outside, but in the inside I feel like hurting. When I go to sleep at night I feel like I'm weak, and hopeless, and I start to think crazy. Thoughts run through my mind. I get so scared I don't know what to do. I have nowhere to run and no one besides God. I feel like I should take the high road and stop trying to hide. Or should I ...

-Lil' Mama Hanna, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Lil' Mama, we all go through these feelings of pain, weakness and hopelessness. But, there is a way out. What is the most important thing to you in the whole world? What makes you happy? You really should focus on these things, rather than the negative things in your life. With a positive outlook, you can win! What do you think?

Don't Know What We Want

Nowadays we think about prostitutes and girls
and we don't even pay attention to what goes on in the world.

We smoke weed.

We drink liquor.

We chill on the block.

We sell dope to women, we call knocks.

But we don't really know what we want in life.

Some people just want to grind and shoot some dice.

-Lil' Sheedy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Man! This is good stuff. How come most people don't look outside themselves and look at what is going on with other people and the world? Is it selfishness and not knowing much else? You are young and you should have fun too but since you get caught up you got to learn to chill. It sounds like you have a desire to pay attention to the world and know what you want in life. How will you start to do this?

The System Is Messed Up

I think the system is messed up. The judge always trying to lock me up, but what he or she don't know that when I get out, it's still going to be the same, nothing's going to change and the DA always hating.

Why don't they just give us one more chance to be free, but no — you want to send us to a group home, Camp Sweeny, Thunder Road, or CYA and what's messed up is the PO. Forget them POs, and if you really want to know how to help us out, go what we go through, live the life we do, and see if you can survive in the Oakland streets...

-Love, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Solid piece! Do you feel that you're somehow punishing the system through not changing your ways? That in some way you want to prove to them that no matter what they do, you'll never change? Well, newsflash — it's your life that you're playing with — not theirs. They get to go home after putting you in a placement or probation etc. Now, when will you get to do the same?

Learning The System From My Brother

The system is helping me by staying out of jail. I really learned the system from my brother because he's been through all this stuff. He's been through Camp, Juvenile, Group home, he even been through YA. But I really did not listen to him.

But now I am in here. I know how it is; now I learned my lesson. Some people say when they first come they won't come back, but they come back. But me, I am a really good person, and when if I say I won't come back, then I won't come back.

I had to find out the hard way. How the system works, I do not like, but I said I learned my lesson. But I think that the system helps me from coming in here, I can show you better than I can tell you.

When I get out I am going to attend to go to a school. I am also going to try to make it to the pros, I mean the NBA.

-Jakeem, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Do you believe that everything is what you make it? Do you think that each person determines what his or her stay will be like in the system? Why do you think so many people complain about how the system works and its unjust conditions? Do you feel that sometimes it's unfair? Why or why not?

**I had to find out
the hard way. How
the system works**

What We Are Faced With

What we do for a reputation

Violence is a repetition

#1's interested in a resolution

Young girls turning to prostitution

Then going to court to face prosecution

In a world today, there's no protection

An' everyone wants perfection

An' wherever you go there are expectations

And two young kids' schools an' exemption

But to be somebody in life, you need an education

To stop and think where we're headed is frustration

This is our nation

-Traviesa, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is a powerful poem about the sad reality of some young people's lives. It's so difficult to be caught up in the thug mentality and try to increase your academic mentality. How can you not let your past stop you from getting your education and living a free life? You are such an intelligent young woman and we see a big future for you. How can your old mind and behavioral habits stop you from success?

**Everything that I have ever
worked for has been taken
from me just for a stupid fight.**

How Twisted

I feel the system is messed up. Once you are in the system it's made to fail. Probation officers

are supposed to help keep you out of trouble, but it seems that they just get you into trouble.

Every kid in the system is not bad, but they are treated as if they are. Every kid is treated as a criminal, as if they killed a cop or something.

I feel courts should see a kid's living condition before they did the crime. They can see how they can help the kid stay out of trouble, rather than punishing them for their crime. The system should give any kid with a robbery or drug case a job when they are released. If the system treated kids right maybe kids would be cool on the outs.

-Lil Mary

From The Beat: So basically what you're saying is that the system should be structured to help, as opposed to be just about punishment. Very good point... but here's one thing to think about: there are a lot of programs which DO try to help. They're not part of the system, but they are there to help people get out of the system. Have you ever tried reaching out to programs, to The Beat. You'd be amazed at the people you might meet.

A Stupid Fight

I feel like my life has been taken away all for catching an assault charge. I beat the shhh out of someone. He couldn't keep his mouth shut.

I am 18 years old right now and I'm gonna be locked up in CYA till I'm 25 or even longer. The only thing I can do is wait and make myself stronger.

Every night I sit and think about that night. Everything that I have ever worked for has been taken from me just for a stupid fight.

-Joker, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Joker, everything you've worked for has been taken away. But now that you are in the situation that you are in, what can you do? What can you work for? All you got is time. How will you spend your time? What do you want to accomplish by the time you are a free man?



Follow The System

I think the system ain't shhh.
All we got to do is follow the rules and the law
so we can get out of jail soon.
'Cause I know nobody likes to be locked up.
If we don't follow the system we're screwed.
So I just do what I got to do.
But right now I feel like my life has been taken away
because the system ain't giving me the education that I was
getting on the outs.
I got locked up for something that wasn't worth it
and the system messed up my life.
I been locked up for a few months
I'm going to be locked up for about almost a year if I do
good.
I got homies doing life,
that's why I think what I'm going through ain't shh.

-Pollo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Pollo, a year will hopefully go by quickly. You sound like you know what you got to do. What do you think about your future now that you made some bad choices? Sounds like you will not follow in the footsteps of your homies. What will be your game plan? Where do you see yourself in five-ten years?

The System

There is a person that works in the system who helped me. How? She gave me support, confidence and made me realize that I'm better than how I think of myself. She told me that I have a lot going for myself and I shouldn't have made these choices and should pick better friends. At least the ones that has the ability to be somebody.

The system is a place for kids to rehabilitate and be better, but most kids take it the wrong way. Kids always blaming somebody else. They need to understand that if you do the crime, you better be ready to do your time. I always thought the system was a set up, but it ain't because you have the to be able to have self-control and you have to maintain how you do your actions. Be aware of the consequences. People in the system could be bad and do you wrong, but you have to find the right one who cares.

-Lil' Mama Hanna, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Now that you have this knowledge, how can you use it? Do you have self-control? Is there anyone in the system that you can help? You have a lot going on for yourself. Where is your life going?

A Veteran of The System

One thing I would change about the system
is that if a kid is in a group home and they have been to more then 10 group homes
because they don't like them, and they are suffering major depression
because they miss they family,
and every time he/she goes to court they want him/her to stay in a group home
until he/she does good, but it's hard because of the depression
they are crying a lot, sad, thinking of killing him/herself and more,
but the court still wants the system to be in his/her life,
also his/her family comes to visit a little, but family wants him home.
If the kid needs therapy then he can do it at home with a therapist.
Every time the kid is with his family, he does good.
It's hard being in the system.
This is me, I have been in the system since I was 9 years old,
I am 17 now.
The story is about me.

-Mark, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Mark, you've been in the system for eight years now. How do you think your case could have been handled differently? What have you learned in the system? How are you doing now? Is your lawyer helpful? Who are your advocates? Are they helping you get your needs met?

The Criminal Justice System

Today there are many problems with the criminal justice system, some bigger then others.

As one person, I realize that I can not change it by myself, but as a community our voice can be heard.

Being incarcerated myself, I know first hand that the court system is a one sided deal. Not only are they denying me a second chance, but opening up an old case because of my second mistake. Even though the crimes that I have committed were not violent crimes they refuse to even let me be released on EM.

They are keeping me from getting my education, which they are always talking about the importance of.

Although I have committed the same crime twice, after going to the hall I would never do anything to put myself in a position to come back. After going to my last court date, I was informed by my probation officer that they are opening my old case. So not only do I have to go to court once, but twice, and will get no second chance.

At my last court date I was told that the DA did not want to make a deal, but charge me with a felony, and give me a minimum punishment of 16 months.

-Chris, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You're right, only as a community can our voice be heard, and The Beat Within is definitely a community of voices that are doing our part to point out the good and the bad. So simply by writing this you are doing your part! You are a smart cat. So what do you think it is going to take to fix the problems with our Criminal Justice System? Keep writing!

Can't Change The System

I really don't have nothing to say about the system, only that you can't change it. It's like the game of life. The game don't change, the people do. The game remains the same, always.

The system will not change and if it happens to change a little bit, the staff will try and find a way to manipulate the system to get what they want, when they want it and how they want it. They will study the rules from the cover to the back of the book.

For example, if you piss a shady group counselor off, and they know you like to eat, they will give you something called a diet plate. And when you say this is not enough food, it's not fair; I'm writing a grievance on you, they will say, "The real book says that you are only to receive four

ounces of this and a few ounces of tha." So no matter what, they will try and find a way to manipulate the rules and the system, period.

-Howard, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Howard, the system is messed up. With this knowledge what kind of advice would you give a youngsta entering the system for the first time? Do you see yourself in the system for your whole life? What can some one do to cope with this dirty game called The System?



Camp Life

Camp life, really truly stressful
Man, I can't live like this anymore I need to be blessed
I sought to change my life
I strive truly, but it ain't worth the fight
I feel the fright with the sleepless nights
Camp made me see things different
Ninjas who talk, say they're not listenin'
Sooner or later they come up missin'
On a piece of paper, maybe on a milk box cover
So what now have you discovered about my camp life?
Ever since I got to camp, I've become an inspired writer
Things that come that have come has been a true insight
Everything from now and later, past and present
Things I have seen has been heaven sent
Maybe my last writings today, my last sighting
Anytime soon, camp life will be like living on a lagoon
Camp life, ain't it just the best?
Camp life, living in the stress
Camp life, less than the best
Please, please put my soul to rest

-Pastor J-Wizzle, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We would like to know how this camp life is stressful for you and how it can be improved. How do you handle business and get through those sleepless nights? One day, camp life will be a memory. Till then do your best and keep expressing yourself.

Shall I Have

Shall I have astonishing pain?
Shall I have terror from the thoughts that aim?
Shall I have to endure suffering injustice?
Shall I have rips of shame?
Beautiful insights because I sure don't bang.
Shall I have victory in my reach?
Shall I have any more lessons to be learned?
No stress and love is what I learn.
Shall I say, "is that too much to ask?"
I am sure you'll have plenty of time to finish this task.
Secrets meant to be kept.
Hearts torn apart wept.
Angry astonished lives being swept.
Living in doubt, full of test.
Love and pain put my soul to rest.
Integrity seeps through the mind.
Having lived life too far behind.
Absent from the past to the present.
Visions of Christ must be heaven sent.
Education is the key to a mental repent.

-Pastor J-Wizzle, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your creativity is inexhaustible! These short lines have so much meaning. We see the pain you carry but also the light within shining through the inevitable darkness of life. Continuing your education and your curiosity will take you very far. Your faith will get you through the hard times in life.

I Got The Blues

I got the blues, old fashion heartache blues
The blues that you get free of
Things that boggle your mind
I got the blues
My life will make you lose
I suppose those blues will
Simply make you choose
Dirty, dirty blues
I got the blues
County shoes gave me the creeps
Thinking of every fright, how long can I sleep?
Trying to shake this hatred
for these stinkin' rotten county blues

-Pastor J-Wizzle, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It takes courage to put your blues out there like this. Props to you. Sounds like you are having trouble sleeping. This is the second time you mention troubled nights. If there is anything you are concerned about, talk to someone. It would be difficult to surrender to sleep and relax at camp. Try your best and remember that sleep is really just to rest your mind and body, so doing one or the other will refresh you.

Pastor J-Wizzle's Page

Lay It Down

Sittin' in camp, had to lay my soul down
Didn't wanna talk or hear no sound
But to y'all I still had to lay it down
Jail and camp made me change my life
Everything that I want, I had to strive
For not once, but for twice, but for y'all
I still had to lay it down
Writing to myself to believe my thoughts
Wondering when have I fought my last fight
But to y'all I still had to lay it down
From the ghetto to the suburb
I feel like a farmer trying to herd my last cattle
But to y'all I still had to lay it down
Youngster, sixteen years, laying it down
Gain knowledge with a prospective change on life
Holla if ya hear me

-Pastor J-Wizzle, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You laid it down here in your writing. Who is "y'all" in this writing? The Beat or someone or something else? We like the way you use writing to understand your thoughts and self. We see this change happening within you. You are very wise.

Chapter 2, The Heart Of A Man

The heart of a man,
Divide and conquer is what we understand,
The simplest of thoughts rolled into my plan
Leading now to the heart of a man.
Trials and tribulations speak formerly
Of Lil' Bo, now known as Pastor J-Wizzle,
Turning my life over to fix my situation,
Coming from the heart of a man,
I shall now be patient.
Desperate to gain knowledge,
Actions are challenging,
Tryin' to make it to college,
Hollerin' lets make it one nation,
Delivered from the heart of a man.
Holding on with dear strength,
Life's more than a thought with a
higher rank,
Things are to come and go,
But me I live at the bottom of the
bank,

This is the heart of a man.

-Pastor J-Wizzle, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This poem speaks of your dreams and the dreams of many — to get to the truth, the heart, and to have peace and meaning in one's life. You got heart! We see a transformation happening, in your eyes, through your writing, and even in the symbolic changing of your name. It means so much when someone changes their name and makes a new life for themselves. We wonder if others will have the courage to let go of their destructive and self-destructive behavior.



Pros And Cons In The System

The system has done both — helped me and hurt me. It has helped me when I'm on the outs. Whenever I get tempted to do something I'm not supposed to do I think of coming back to juvy (juvenile hall) and think of those hard beds, nasty food, and all that restriction. And after thinking 'bout this place, I'll not want to do what ever it was tempting me because I don't want to be up in here.

Being in juvy to me is like killin' yo'self slowly because when you are in here yo' ain't really not doin' nothing productive. So everyday you have in here is like one day less you have left to live. That goes to my next point as to why I don't like the system and what it has done to hurt me.

It has harmed me 'cause there's only a certain amount of locking up a person can take, and if you got hella time to do, you can go crazy. Or if you seventeen years old like I am, you don't need to be wastin' anymore time. You need to start worryin' 'bout yo' future, and what you want to be in five, ten, fifteen, twenty years from now. Not worrying about getting high, drunk, or some quick cash, 'cause that shhh isn't always goin' to get you where you need to be. And gettin' high is not gon' pay yo' rent in 5 years.

-Amanda

From The Beat: You are a thinker and that's good. Some people don't even think about getting locked up when they are doin' dirt. It sounds like you are getting more mature over time and with age. If you need assistance with staying off drugs and drink, get it. As far as being locked up and it taking from your life, we see what you mean but how can you make your time well spent? Some suggestions are reading, writing, contemplating, talking to others, learning and teaching... all this can improve your skills. Well-written commentary.

The Mess You Up System

Some thing that I would tell someone else about the system is that they can mess you up and give you a lot of time for some thing little.

That means that you shouldn't even do anything to get your self in the system. So that means don't do anything bad like; steal cars, robbery, drugs, or any other bad things.

-Dejon

From The Beat: Well bad things no matter the size of the crime will keep you down. So, when you get your chance at freedom, you now know the system isn't a joke, right? And violating another will keep you forever down.

Straighten Up and Fly Right

Once I get out of juvenile hall I will tell my friends that they should straighten up and not be bad and do what's right, not wrong. That's what I'll tell them, and how bad it is in here, I'll tell them I didn't like it in here and do well, do well in school and go to college.

-Unknown Juvenile

From The Beat: Good. We wish you could tell us more about how bad the system is? These counselors and the programs they offer don't seem too bad to us. One thing for sure you're right, education is the key.

The System's Clothes

Once I get out I will tell people that juvenile is not a good place, because you do not know how it feels to wear other people shoes, pants, and draws.

-Roderick

From The Beat: Some of us do not know that feeling, but the majority of The Beat's readership know exactly how you feel, and we bet they support you in urging others to see a better way. What else will you tell your friends and family?

Nathan's Thoughts

I don't eat fast food.

I like high price rooms.

Yes, the staff has been helping me out.

By taking time and listening to us more often.

No the system do not hurt the kids in the system.

I will make the system easier.

-Nathan

From The Beat: We like your thoughts. They are honest. Keep pushing yourself to stay focused. You have a lot to share with the world.

It Helps and Hurts You

I think the system is doing both. It's helping me and at the same time it's hurting me.

How's it helping me? It's helping me by teaching me not to do crimes because this place keeps you away from your family and other loved ones. It keeps you away from doing things you like to do. You may like to spend time with your girl, you may like to play basketball, or whatever, you can't do none of that stuff up in here, you're not free to do what you want. You got to eat when they tell you to, go to the bathroom when they tell you, then they give you a time limit. Man, that ain't cool.

This ain't the place you want to be. Another way it's hurting me is I don't have the patience, and it's mind bothering, but I had to find out the hard way.

-Ellis

From The Beat: Do you feel like you learned any life lessons from being in the system? What do you think is the hardest part about being in the system? Do you feel the system is fair? Why or why not? How can the system improve? What are you doing to better yourself?

The Set Up

The system is jacked up, because they set you up to fall. For example when you are on probation they give you an ample amount of time to mess up. They will send you to a group home, so you can fail in the first couple of months. Then you will be back in here hella mad and wanting to go home.

-Nazim

From The Beat: You can see it as a set up, yet you take the bait. Why fall for the set up? Instead when opportunity arises, step up and go to school, pass on that weed, get home for curfew, do your program, ask questions and be successful! If you can manage this, you'll be hella glad not mad!

That Locked Up Feeling

my mind starts to go crazy

my hairs start to fall out.

missing my family,

love ones,

missing the streets and my girl.

missing all the love

my mom

dad

young ones,

i miss my own clothes.

i don't like when people to tell me when

i can use the bathroom

i miss home.

i was away from my family for a few weeks and three days.

i think it's time for me to go back home. we have love at home; this is not a place for us to be.

-Lil' Kevin

From The Beat: Recognizing that the Hall/incarceration is not the place to be is the first step, now we ask you what are you going to do when freedom comes 'round? The hardest part is your actions. Hopefully your family and friends will be supportive.

Staff Are Unfair

I hate the system

The staff up in the hall be doing too much, acting like they can't be touched, they be on some other stuff, Locking us up in our room fo' shhh we did not do.

All I hear is "roomtime," "roomtime,"

Women staff don't like me 'cause I'm mad, fly and icy.

I get too hifey,

-Jasmine

From The Beat: The system can be unfair. How can it be better? All that stuff about other people's boyfriends wanting you wasn't necessary. Do you think that the female staff act differently towards you because you don't like other females. You act as if it's all about competition and getting the most guys. This mentality will leave you lonely and empty in the end. There's more to life than that.

Home Sweet Home

I wanna go home.

Oh home sweet home.

I didn't like home at first but being here is a curse.

I miss home it seems so far away.

I wish I could climb that gate,

oh home sweet home.

I want to eat my own food,

not this county food,

oh home sweet home.

-Tinkerbell

From The Beat: This is a creative poem! You use a common saying as a lyric. That's coo'. Why didn't you like home? How can you use this time in the hall to give you a chance to take a good hard look at your life as of now? Have you thought about writing a letter to your family and expressing all the thoughts and feelings you have about home. Sometimes putting it all out there can bring about change. How can you do your part to make your home a sweet reality?

Trust

I been locked up for 9 months now, and it is time to get the hell up out of the hall.

I be trying to be good, but it's real hard.

All of you who are not in this system, don't come because it is not coo'. I been coming in and out for a year or two.

When you don't have a daddy in your life, it's hard. My daddy was in and out of my life and it is really hard for me to trust people. I don't trust nobody.

-Raymond

From The Beat: Thanks for writing this, it's a good reminder of the fact that if we don't have people who can support us, it makes it hard to stay out of the traps. When you get out, since you don't have your dad for support, you need to find a way to get people who can support you. You may not feel this right now, but if the world isn't giving you what you want, you have to find it. Go find yourself a mentor through a program, someone who can show you right from wrong, someone you can learn from. We know people who did just that, and they got out of the cycle, and stayed out, and now they have good lives. It can be done.

The System is Shady...

'Cause it's a set up and it don't care what we say, we are the ones who are locked up but they don't hear our opinion.

The public defender is supposed to help you, but sometimes they mess with you and you can't do anything but do the time and try to fight. But if you do get out and try to do good, you don't have a chance to get a job because, either you got a felony or something... to where you're just stuck.

-L-Burn

From The Beat: Do you feel stuck? Tell us some examples of times you tried to do good, or get a job, and things didn't work out for you. Your life experience is a valuable teacher, for us and for your peers reading The Beat. If you could do things differently, what would you do?

The public defender is supposed to help you

Getting Mad and Madder

Being up in juvenile hall has changed the way I act. I am getting mad and madder. Some times I just do push-ups to calm myself down. I keep doing the same thing everyday, that's what gets me angry. People talking trash makes me mad, and I just don't do anything, but I'm getting release on Friday.

-Lil' E

From The Beat: So are you getting mad at yourself because you put yourself in such a predicament? What must you do to stay out? So, how many push ups are you doing? Thousands??

My Juvenile Hall Discovery

I've notice what my mom was saying, about me following what ever my friends do. When I didn't listen this is what happen, I went to juvenile hall.

So I guest I will just stop doing what I use to do.

-Damon

From The Beat: You guess you'll stop!? Come on! You recognize the problem, so step up to the plate and make something better of your life. You are more than a juvenile hall detainee!

Life In The State

I feel the system ain't right, because the system is set up for us to make them look stupid.

I feel they wrong 'cause they be sending people to the 'Y' for little petty things. I feel they don't even really give people chances like that to do the right things, they just send you to a place where you don't want to be. They just messing people lives up. Because when you go to the "Y" you get out on parole, and if you're on parole you really won't be able to get a job. So right there they messing our lives up, because if we can't get a job people can go back out and sell drugs or do what they got to do to get money.

So that's what I feel about the system. It just ain't right!

-Lil' Lo

From The Beat: You're describing the worst part of the vicious cycle of lockdown. The only good news is that there are still organizations that can help get work and help with schooling, like Job Corps and Americorps and even your local boys and girls club. You won't make as much as on the street, but you already know there's nothing easy OR quick about that quick and easy money.

The Change In Me

Now I know not to anything else to come back in here.

I'm not going to do anything bad because it follows you on and on.

If I do, do anything else, I'm going to stay out of the way for a minute.

So I will not have to deal with the police.

-Terrance

From The Beat: Staying away for a minute? The police will still be cruising the neighborhood when you get back on the spot, and if they swoop yo uup, you know where you're going... Yes indeed, juvenile hall.

The System

I'm writing about the system. First I want to say I don't like the system. If I can change one thing I would change the way they feed people. Because it is not enough food.

-Hungry

From The Beat: No name on your paper. You must have a higher metabolism and need to eat more. We wish that the system would be able to cater to everyone's individual needs. Use this as a motivator to not violate your probation when you are on the outs.

I Disagree

I highly disagree with what the system is doing to minors and capable of doing to minors and their families.

Also, I feel that the system should make alternatives for people who've committed crimes instead of these set-up placements.

-Aj

From The Beat: Aj, what kind of alternatives do you think would work? We want to know what you think will help the system work better.

What About a Second Chance?

I think the system is sometimes OK, and sometimes, the system is just waiting for you to do something, so you can be put into Juvenile Hall or prison etc...

It's a way to teach someone a lesson if they keep coming back towards the system.

If it is your first time then you should at least get one chance to be a better person in your life. Then it all depends on a criminal, because if the criminal is doing bad things over and over then I think the system is for you.

Everybody makes mistakes and then learns from them, so I believe the system should give you one chance to be a better person in life. And if not, then it's on you because the system already has given you a chance to be a better person in life and then it doesn't matter you like the system or not you don't because that's the system.

Personally, I learned from my mistake and I won't ever do this again in my life, so I believe I should get another chance to be a better person in life. I think the judges, p-o's and d-a's should feel sorry for people, if it's their first time.

-Gs

From The Beat: If the system gives you that second chance (and believe us, we hope it does), what will you do with it? You seem confident in your future success, share your thoughts and knowledge with your peers reading The Beat, it's knowledge we all need!

Half And Half

I think half of the system is wrong and half of it is right. I think the judge should give people second and even third chances.

Instead of listening just to the PO, I think they should listen to the people they're sending to jail and their parents.

I think they shouldn't just go off what the police say.

-My Thoughts

From The Beat: These are great suggestions. Wish we knew who wrote them (you forgot to write your name.) We hope for the remainder of your time incarcerated that you get heard and treated well.

I'm going to think and act right

My Actions

Incarceration has changed me a lot in how I act and my actions.

Along time ago I had one of those, I don't give a... attitudes, but now that I'm in the family preservation unit I must think.

Since I'm in juvenile, I'm going to think and act right so I could get out of jail with all of these characters in Alameda County juvenile hall.

-Lil' Kev

From The Beat: Tell us more about this Family Preservation Unit? How has it helped you with your actions? What's the game plan upon leaving the Hall?

Forget The System

The system is messed up 'cause I can't go see my ruca and my little baby hijo. I miss them so much but I pray to God all day everyday. My baby is about to be two months. But I've been thinking about my ruca and especially my future.

What's going to happen when I get out from here? The best thing is living, my homies, my pipa, and I just think about my little morita, she's my heart and my everything. I have my furia and my cantona my on ramfla but I know I'm not going to change so fast and easy so forget the system.

-Chiquilia

From The Beat: You may not be able to change so fast and easy, but how else are you going to achieve what you want? What do you need to do to live your life according to what is important to you? What do you think the future has in store for you? Do you have any power over this?

The System Is Unfair

The system is unfair to everybody in my mind, it was made to screw us over for any little thing we do.

Take this crazy vato for instance, I just recently caught an assault charge and now I'm on my way to CYA for 7 years.

I feel like the system hand picks one out of every 10 kids off the streets and blows up every little thing that they've done in their lives.

So all that I really have to left to say is stay up and forget the system.

-Joker

From The Beat: Do you feel that you were treated unfairly by the system? How do you think your case could have been handled differently? Do you see yourself in the system your whole life? Where do you see yourself in 15-20 years? Tell us readers what you were doing before your incarceration!

Forget The System

It's the kid Pretty Yitty and being in the system ain't pretty.

I tell the staff I'm stressin' and they got the nerve to say "really?"

But people can't tell how I feel just by having a conversation with me I never knew that this probation could be so hard fo' a youngsta from Oakland.

I'd then been violated for the trees I've been smoking.

But anyway they don't wanna hear what we gotta say

facing federal time 'cause a ninja had a lot of weight.

Now I'm going through it and a ninja ain't feeling me.

Imagine 25 or sentenced to the death penalty.

Like Jay-Z, "I know you got yourself a gun but when you get caught you facing prop 21."

This shhh is getting crazy 'cause a ninja ain't got no hope.

You could get a year for getting caught with one bop of dope.

And if you in the pen make sure you don't drop that soap,

'Cause the guard goin' let that ass get broke

And I ain't goin' say shhh 'cause

I ain't goin' talk about the system.

Forget the system.

-Pretty Yitty

From The Beat: We wish it was that easy, just say "F" the system. But, there is a system; unfortunately you are caught up in it. How do you think the system could have handled your situation differently? What are you going to do to better yourself?

I am not sure what lesson he wants me to learn by going to CYA, all that will do is make me worse

More Chances

The system could get better if the judge gave the kids more than a few chances to do better despite the case even if it's a robbery, assault, anything but a murder. I think it would be better if the judge just made them pay a fine, pay the person that was robbed or assaulted and pay a little extra besides restitution. Then after the fourth time, send them wherever you gon' send 'em depending on the case.

-Chris

From The Beat: Good idea. Some people do learn from their mistakes or after a few mistakes. What if the person doesn't have the money to pay? What about rape? Or child abuse? Wouldn't it be a bad idea to put someone back on the street if they habitually do their crime? On a more personal tip, what is it going to take for you to not do your crime, if you did one?

Waste Of Time

I think the system is making us worse 'cause it's just a waste of time. Like me being here for some dumb reason and the court keeps making court dates. They should just tell me what's gone happen. They making it difficult but I know sooner or later I'll be out and I'll make my changes by my own.

They think the system is gon' help you. Hell naw, I don't think so. I want to say, don't let the system take over you. And to all the homies keep your head up.

-Giggles

From The Beat: We can see where you're coming from — what is this program doing for you? How could your program improve? How can you take improving into your own hands? Do you think you wasted your time when you were on the outs too? How will you be more careful about what you do for you time now that you know how precious freedom is?

It's Hard To Get Out

To me, I think the system is hella messed up, and once you get caught up in this system, it is hard for a young teen to get out off because they try to lockyou up for any and every little thing that you do. So that's why when I get out I am going to try my best to stay out of this messed up system to the fullest. You feel me! Holla at yo' gurl.

-Young K GU

From The Beat: We feel you all right. Good luck turning this desire into reality.

It's Hurting Me

The system is not helping me one bit because if it was helping me, I wouldn't keep coming here. So I think it just keeps setting me up for the failure, so screw all this stuff.

I am through with all this 'cause I get a straight release in a couple of weeks. So screw the system and the owner of the hall.

-Lil' Mike

From The Beat: If the system was helping, yeah, it would make sense if you stopped coming. How are you going to take getting your stuff together into your own hands? We wish you the best when you get out. Don't do the same things and if you can't help it, get help!

Change In The System

I would give the detainee more chances to explain his or her case. I know that if I would have had a chance to explain myself, my consequences would not have been so bad.

In my case, the system is hurting me. I would have graduated high school but my PO violated my ass. Now I'm sitting in this stupid ass hall counting the days till my release.

-Anonymous

From The Beat: We wish you could have graduated too but for some reason this is your situation. Maybe old stuff coming back to haunt you or maybe old habits get you caught up. Figure it out so you can finish your education and stay free.

Judges Don't Care

The judge doesn't care
But who said life's fair?
All they do is give you time
These cities are full of crime
Judges just don't care
It doesn't matter if you home
Or doing five in the "Y"
But for all you homies locked up,
Just keep your head up and try.

-Squirrel

From The Beat: You mention that judges don't care but is the same thing true about those who do crime? Do they care about themselves or about the person(s) they do the crime against? Do you think that a judge should learn more about someone before they sentence them? Since you can't make other people care more, how can you start to care more?

Love Not Violence

The system's the one that could make the system a little better even though it's not supposed to be a good place. But it should have better opportunities like say I'm not trying to be nasty or inappropriate but you should be able to have sexual intercourse with your loved ones from the outside world. That would make it a little less violent. Plus I know that would never happen in juvenile hall.

-Demarrio

From The Beat: Thanks for being honest about your suggestions. We think you make a good point — if people got more loving in prison and juvy, maybe they wouldn't be so frustrated, irritated and angry. Then again, it may only temporarily solve the problems of violence. Do you think violence goes a lot deeper than a physical need to release?

Someday I Will Quit

The system always releases me
because I smashed on the judge and the DA
They fear a pimp like the "G"
They wonder if I pop pills, and smoke weed and sell "D"
People discriminate because I hang with the OG's,
ride in fancy cars and shine so hard
People look at me like a star
Maybe someday I will quit,
but for now I like that shhh

-Anonymous

From The Beat: Thanks for being honest. We know some of it is fun but some of it hurts people and you. Remember all the shine you got never lasts. What will be your stopping point? When you are facing a long sentence? When someone you love dies or you lose someone that give up on you? Or has this already happened? We hope one day you will care more and value your life.

Nothing Good About It

It's set up for us to fail, ain't nothing good about being in the system at all.

I'm locked up now. As we speak, they sending me to LA. I was supposed to leave and I didn't because my PO had something to do.

Second chances sometimes always go on, but I don't give myself a second chance. I go for the goal, and if I don't make it the first time, I start all over again.

If my little sisters were about to come in here or were going down the road I have went down, I would tell them this is not doing nothing but holding them down and sending them down a wrong road.

-Lil' Mercedes GU

From The Beat: It's often hard to find what's positive in the system, but since you're in it, do your best to learn all you can. Good luck in LA and in your future.

Stuck In The Web

I think the system's messed up. As soon as you get in it, you can't get out of it. One thing I would change about the system is to release us to our grandmas that are old and need help at home.

At least let us out on EM to be home and at all time times. It for sure would be helpful, like taking care of little brothers or sisters.

-Lil' Payaso

From The Beat: We wish you were able to go home and help out too. It must be difficult for you to feel so powerless. How can you think more next time before you get caught up? What happened to the parents and guardians that were supposed to take care of the kids? It must put a lot of pressure on you. Ask for help when you need it.

The One Thing I Would Change

I would change the way they only let you use the phone when time to and when you first get to juvenile hall. Also the way they make you take a cold shower when you get to the juvenile hall. I think they should give some good people that didn't do anything a chance to do right.

-Matthew

From The Beat: Telephone privileges are difficult because some people take advantage. Maybe more phone privileges for those who show they can do it. Cold showers suck! Do you consider yourself a "good" person? Doesn't everyone deserve a chance or help?

Now Dig This

Well, I hope I get to leave because to my understanding, my PO is trying to play me. Now dig this . . .

I'm 17 3/4, right. Ok, I came in here on a probation violation. I go to court on my B-day, April 9th, and my PO is requesting 850 for six months of juvenile lock-up time. Just because I have lock up time, she wants to lock me up.

I feel like my life is over. I am the girl that got shot downtown on the side of Carl's Jr. in 2000. I've been through so much bull in my life it ain't even funny. Y'all just pray for me.

-Glenda GU

From The Beat: Man, Glenda, you have been through it. What do you mean you have lock up time? Does your PO want to send you to 850 because you can't stay in Juvenile past 18? What do you know about the 850 program? Why does it make you feel your life will be over? You won't be getting an adult record there.

It's set up for us to fail, ain't nothing good about being in the system at all.

The System's Something Crazy

The system eat you up and spit you out like it's nothing. But I know it's something.

It's crazy; I let the judge play me.

I don't know what to do but stay true
And stay strong.

The system rips me apart, and I went very far.
Life is not a game. You'll never be the same.

That's a shame.

It will have you lookin' naive, I don't know what to do. But stay down, not be a clown

Because my life can stop at any time.

What are you supposed to do once you're in the system?

I feel alone I don't feel strong.
Different situations with my life.

I take control of my stuff.

The system is nothing nice

It won't have you lookin' twice!

Why me? Why my life?

Taking all my time.

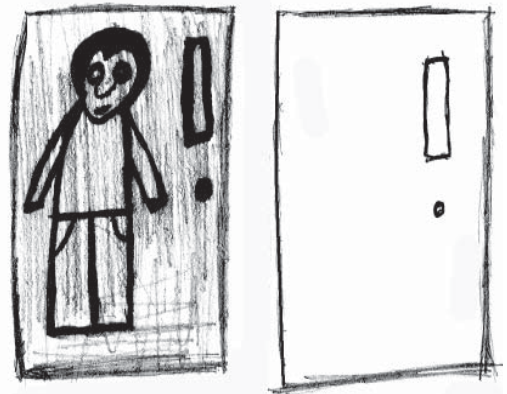
Why the system messed.

I won't end up stuck

I don't give a . . .

-Tiffany GU

From The Beat: Good, true flow, Tiffany. The system is something crazy and it can eat your life like nothing else. What do you have to do to get yourself free since the system will be cool with keeping you in it?



The System Is Hurting Us

I think the system is all messed up because most people should be able to go home instead of just sitting here thinking about what we could be doing right now.

If I could change anything, I would change how people just stay here. I think that all the system is doing is hurting us.

When I do get out, I will teach everybody that this juvenile system is all messed up. I don't feel how they accuse you of committing a crime that you didn't do.

While incarcerated I discovered that I can't do shhh about it because it's now in the hands of somebody called the system.

-Billy B5

From The Beat: We understand you think that most people here should be allowed to go home because being here isn't helping you, but then, what should happen to people who jack, people who steal, people who shoot and maim or kill? In other words, is there anything that can be done in or out of the system that would reduce the crime and violence that bring so many of you to the halls, to the Y, to jail, to prison, or to the grave?

Can't Do Nothing About The System

Yo, what's up? This yo' boy, Tuna, back at you with some real shhh. I'm kind of happy 'cause my ninja just got out. He been here fifteen months for something he didn't do. So I know he out keeping it up for me.

Man, but it's real out there now. I'm supposed to be out some time soon, 'cause this shhh is getting to me. I'm in here for something I really didn't do.

They say do something about the system. I feel like "Forget the system!"

-Tuna B4

From The Beat: Well, Tuna, you didn't give us much to go on for changing the system. Are you saying the system cannot be changed? Do you think it's always been the same and will always be the same? Do you think it's easier to be here if you're guilty than if you're innocent? Are there things that can be done in here that would make it easier for you and others to remain innocent on the outside? Are there things on the outside that would make it easier for you not to come to the hall? Just saying, "Forget the system" doesn't get you very far.

The System Is Messed Up

What I think about the system is it is screwed up because they got ninjas living a screwed up life. When you get in the system it's hard to get off of it.

But this is somebody's system that they got me in, and I know I can't do nothing or say nothing to make this system different. I wish I can make something happen about the system, but I can't even get myself out the system.

So, I know I can't do nothing about how the system got a ninja alive.

-Lil' D B4

From The Beat: We wish you would have spent some time explaining your first sentence about ninjas living screwed up lives. Is there anything that you can suggest that would make those lives less screwed up? If you can't do anything about the system, can you do anything about your own choices that let the system take you in, or is your life too screwed up to make better choices?

No More Games In The System

The one thing I would change about the system is that when we go to court stop playing games. If we going home then let us go. Don't hold us for one more month, and then say go home. If we not then say so.

The one person who helped me is Merv from The Beat Within. He helped to stay out of the gang life. I am in a gang, and he told me what happened to him, and it got me thinking.

The system could have handled my situation better, because I'm here this time for not going to school. They should have let me stay here for one week, and let me go back out there. It's not like I'm hurting people.

The system is helping me because it's showing me that if I don't do what I should be doing I'll be in here for the rest of my life. I heard about the big jails, and all I heard about there is true and a lot more. But about YGC I heard nothing.

I guess what they do with us is right, because they're showing us breaking the law is not good.

-Alvin B1

From The Beat: We appreciate your suggestions for making the system better, and especially for the props you give to our good friend, Merv. It's good that the system is showing you that you need to do what you should be doing. So, what should you be doing (that you didn't know before)? If they had let you go after one week, would you have gone back to school?

The POs don't care about what is going on with the youth unless it was their own.

The System Don't Care

The system don't give a flying fig about you. If you don't believe me, I swear ta God on a fat chick wit' two bags of chicken. I just got a bone took out of my knee, and they ain't tryna let me go home to heal up. So, I'm gone have to ride it out 'til the wheels fall off.

-Tay-Dumpa B4

From The Beat: Well, you could argue that "the system" cared enough to perform that knee surgery on you, even if they won't let you go home to recuperate. We wish you would spend more time either telling us how the system doesn't care, or telling us what the system could do to make it better.

Make The System Better

I don't think the penitentiary should be in the system — and not just the juvenile system, but all of the systems of justice.

I think that the pen does not make people change their lives for the better, it just makes them crazier than they really are. Then they get out, and it be all bad for the next ninja. Then they right back in the freaking pen.

-Young Charles B5

From The Beat: In general, we agree that people who enter the penitentiary seldom come out improved. But some do. What is it about certain individuals that they can overcome the system and thrive despite it? If the penitentiary system does not end (and we see no evidence that it will), then what improvements can you think of that might make fewer people go crazy and more people succeed?

Answers

I will change the rules and give more programs. There is only one person that has helped me, her name is like a rose and my attitude is like her water, and when I'm sad, she feels my pain.

I would like for this system to understand our problems. I will tell them to put themselves in our position to see how they really see it.

Me, personally, I messed up, but I got better opportunities out on the streets. I got my mind set up. I'm ready, let me out do my programs and I be all right.

-Cricks B2

From The Beat: Good ideas, especially your wish that the system would understand your problems better. But, we'd love to hear even more details. What kinds of programs have helped you?

Don't Let Me Come Back To The System

I'm on my way out back to the 'hood rats To the God I'm asking for help. Please don't let me come back

The system wouldn't care if I got shot

I just heard yesterday that my ninja got knocked

All they care about is keepin' my ass on lock

But I'm on my way out back to the street to the block

All I know is the killin' ain't gone stop

If I live it's gone be terrific

I just don't want to be another statistic

So all I need in this life of sin

Just me, my family and my girlfriend

Because I love my family and my wifey to the fullest

I'm just gone pray that I don't take a bullet

-Jamoe B4

From The Beat: What can you suggest that would make "the system" work better? How can you make it care about you and your friends? Have you ever had a counselor, a PO, a PD or judge really care about you? What did that caring person have that you wish other adults in the system had? If you were a counselor or PO, how would you be different from what you see now? Do you think they would treat you differently if you were a child of theirs?

The one person who helped me is Merv from The Beat Within. He helped to stay out of the gang life. I am in a gang, and he told me what happened to him, and it got me thinking.

Stay Out Of The System

Once I get out of the system, I am going to do my best to stay out of any systems.

I learned that the PO are used against you, like a trap. The POs are paid to keep you in here, or it seems like it. The POs don't care about what is going on with the youth unless it was their own. We're just another number and a paycheck.

When I get out of here, I'm going to tell all my lil' cousins about the system, and hope they don't make mistakes like I did.

-Jaquez B4

From The Beat: Actually, the PO gets paid whether you're in or out of here, so what do you think the real problem with POs is? If you were in charge of the Probation Department, what would you want your POs to do? What kind of training would you give them? What would you want your PO to do, specifically, that isn't being done now?

weekly writings

So I ran from the group home like six times, and the police finally got tired of me gettin' out after they went through the trouble of arrestin' me and doin' all that paperwork, so they set me up. The DA was camped out watchin' me, and when me and my ninja started beating up a dofehead for being short, hella narcs came outta nowhere and said we robbed him, and then they tried to put some dope on me that wasn't mine.

-Tree B2

-Ledesma B2

-Bear B2

-J-Mac B2

Unknown B2

-Young Cd B2

-Jaydah B1

-Lil' Joe B2

A black and white sketch of a man's face, wearing glasses and having a mustache. The drawing is signed 'M. J. 1988' at the bottom.

The System Strikes Out

I would change the three strikes law because they're getting really strict on little things, and not giving you any chances any more.

I think second chances end when you keep committing a lot of crimes and most felonies. I think they end when they see that you don't learn your lesson and you're still out in the streets committing crimes and coming in and out the Hall several times in the same year.

I think the system should try and help as many times as they need, even if they don't. But if they see you're not progressing, then lock them up.

-A

From The Beat: What do you think would help young people the most to progress? Is it something that could be done in the Hall, or something that could be done before anyone gets to the Hall? What would have helped prevent you from coming here? What will help to keep you out?

This Insatiable System

Come one come all, but be wary — do not come too close for the threat of being consumed into the belly of this oppressive monster should be highly cautioned. Don't be fooled, this piece is not the intro to a horrific film but a strong dose of society turning a blind eye to millions of human beings forced to live in levels upon levels of unsafe concrete jungles. You see, these are the forgotten, the lost loves, sons and daughters, the lifers, the destined for death. These are the people that are forever in a state of a silent scream. These are the people in all the CYAs, the county jails and state pens.

They are the food for this insatiable system, ever powered by a pale-faced soulless beast known as the California Department of Corrections. Know that this is the most powerful mob known to the state. I believe that the people of this country (not by my choice) need to stand up and tame — if not slay — this demon.

I've lost my father, three uncles, and two cousins to the CDC. Let's not stand by any longer. Please if you try real hard you can hear them.

-Bandit

From The Beat: First of all, kudos for a solid piece — it's been awhile since you've dropped something this legit. Let's start with the agreement that gangs shouldn't be allowed to freely roam the streets fighting with each other, that instead there needs to be some legal consequence to their actions. Cool? Okay. Given that assumption, how do you think the system could handle the cases of those who go in for gang-related crimes — or any crimes — better? What would make the CYAs better? How 'bout the Pen? If you could give voice to the silent screams of the incarcerated, what do you think they'd be saying?

These are the people that are forever in a state of a silent scream. These are the people in all the CYAs, the county jails and state pens.

The System: "Got Ya"

Once you in the system it's hard to get out
It's like fighting Ali trying not to get knocked down
It's near to impossible to show that you right
You can keep on prayin' tryin' to see the light
But the system will keep you in the dark
Just want your money

Like two vicious pit bulls always stay hungry
Can't get enough, that's why they keep you locked up
But for all y'all down you got to stay tough
'Cause if you let them take over they'll do nothin' but taunt
Like a ghost that won't go away, keep your house on haunt
So when they finally let you out prove them all wrong
Show how you can stay on top and will always be strong

-Baby L

From The Beat: There is much truth in this piece, especially the opening line — once in, it's hard to get out (like being in a gang...). But "hard" is not the same thing as impossible. So, when you advise people to "stay on top" to "prove them all wrong," are you telling folks to change their ways, to do the right thing and succeed, or are you telling them to be slicker and not get caught? We hope it's the first, because we have too many friends who were too slick to get caught writing to us from state prison.

Hard Times In The System

Man, times is hard for the lil' homie because every time I turn around, one of my homies getting shot, while I'm doing time behind the wall.

I spent four years locked up or on the run. I don't know where to turn, because every time they send me off, I run. Shhh, it's hard for me.

RIP, Lil' Ant, Shoddy, Lil' Dre. Miss y'all. One love...

-Young Quis

From The Beat: We can't even get our minds around the number of young people dying at the hands of other young people. It should be a national disgrace — but the nation is preoccupied with Iraq, and doesn't care about what happens in your community. But all that doesn't get you off the hook for your own decisions. How have you contributed to your own situation? What contribution can you make to change your situation? If you "don't know where to turn," then what can you suggest as a program, a service, or a place where you could turn in times of need?

I Hate The System

First of all, I hate all POs, cops, feds, CIA, and so on, 'cause they just want to lock us up for no reason sometimes, so they can make their money, get awards, and be recognized for busting a criminal.

I must admit, I love making this world a worse place to live in 'cause look at what the government does to the poor neighborhoods, nothing but make it worse. Because of that, I'm so criminal minded. I love what I do best, and that's ride till I die.

I'm looking at some serious time for what I did, but still now I can't see anything wrong for what I did. Putting my life in a white judge hands is full of shhh.

-Indio

From The Beat: We can feel your defiance and anger at everything that has happened to you, but we can't understand how you are hurting the system by giving them the chance to lock you up. Do you really think a Black judge would have been easier on you than a white judge? If you were in charge, what would you do to (or for) someone who committed the crime you committed? Should there be consequences for certain things people do, or should everyone be allowed to do whatever he or she wants to do?

POs And The System

Man, my PO be trying to play me because I am a young thug. But on the other hand, I be trying to get my life right by staying away from the negative stuff.

It's not hard to stay away from that shhh, if you have something positive in front of you.

-No Name

From The Beat: It's easy to stay away from the negative stuff while you're locked up. But can you do the same thing when you have the freedom to make your own choices? What is that positive something that you have in front of you?

The System Fails Me, But I Can't Fail Myself

Stuck in my head with decisions
The Pen or CYA is bound to be my fate
Keeping my head up as life passes by
Try to explain to my mom every time she asks "Why?"
Try to stop her tears every time we say good-bye
At times my head gets heavy, yes, I can't deny
But going back in time is not an option
So I keep on walking and continue to function
I hope a second chance is given in my place
Rather than the boot and a slap in my face
But if it's not, then hey, what can I say
I'll just keep on walking and continue to pray

-Chop

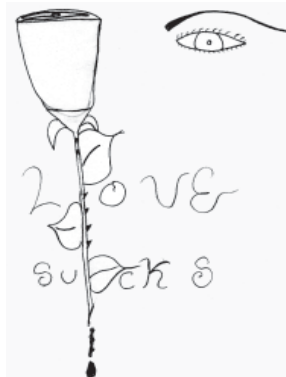
From The Beat: You're right, going back in time is only an option in the movies. So, as you face forward, what do you wish was there for you, either here in the Hall or out there in the community? What would help you both stay out of places like this and get into places like college, a job, a family? If your fate is the pen or the Y, does that mean you have no choice in the matter, no decisions to make that could make a difference?

To The System

You want to help me?
Stop feeding me drugs!
Give me a change.
You want to help me?
Let me think on my own
You want to help me?
Stop taken me away from home!
You want to help me?
Leave me alone!

-Kt

From The Beat: Do you think that leaving you alone is the best way to deal with your challenges? What would stop you from chasing after the drugs that have brought you back to the Hall over and over again if you were set free?



**Try to explain to my mom every time she asks "Why?"
Try to stop her tears every time we say good-bye**

From The Beat: We're not sure you know just how lucky you are. We say that because you seem to think that you can do your drugs without consequences [and we're only talking legal consequences, not physical]. In other words, if you do your year in the hall, then go out and do "your thang," then you may have just put off the inevitable. We hope you prove us dead wrong and never come back!

From The Beat: If you had to design a menu on a tight budget for three meals for one hundred youth every day, what would be on your menu? What else aside from pizza and burritos would you serve? When you do something bad, what do you think the consequences should be?

From The Beat: Where should staff draw the line between giving you program time and punishing those who are messing up? If you get in a fight, should you still get program time? What if you're tagging up the walls, or even keeping others from sleeping by banging? Given that you're up in the Hall, what could make the time better — not more fun, but more productive?

From The Beat: What do you mean when you say they treat you like nothing? If you were in the staff's shoes, or the judge's shoes, how would you treat the youth differently? What is the chance you think you deserve? Now that you've realized that the system isn't a joke, what are you going to do to make sure this is the only time you're under its thumb? How can you keep from feeling too badly about yourself?

From The Beat: What is it about Mr. Lynch that makes him so good? What could other staff members learn from him? How has he been able to get your trust?

**If they have money for high-ass
all-in-one Apple computers, they
can support they damn self.**

From The Beat: We'd like to read a more complete comparison between the juvenile justice system in Alabama and the one here. Which do you think does a better job of changing lives so that young people don't have to come to places like this? What would you suggest for either system to make it better? And what do you mean when you say to the authorities, "...when you do too much then you have more criminals."?

From The Beat: Man, this piece starts off with so much pride and bluster, until you come to the realization that you're not pimping the system at all, and that it's pimping you instead. On the real, you're pimping yourself, and any dirty tricks the system has are ones you're enabling it to act on by putting yourself within its clutches.

From The Beat: Right on for stepping up and recognizing someone who's helped you out. What can other staff learn from her? Do you think it's possible for them to see her as an example of someone who provides the support that you, and many of your peers, need?

**She has such
a kind heart
and I want
to thank
her for that.
Thank you Ms.
Knibbe.**

From The Beat: We can agree with your criticism that the system locks people up for things they shouldn't be locked up for, but what this piece misses is your suggestions for what should be done with those people. What should the consequences be for fraud? As for the food situation, we know we'd hate having to eat institutional food which all tastes the same. So, you want better food but at the same time, you don't want the system to charge you for it. Where should the money come from to pay for the "services" provided in the Hall? What services should the Hall provide that they don't do now? If you were running the place, what changes would you bring?

The System Is Whack

I feel that the system is whack. What they do to handle juvenile sentences every day is wrong. The public pretenders (PDs) don't even pay attention to our stories, and then they make their recommendation to the court, based on their own opinion.

In my situation, what happened was that I was living in a campsite with two of my friends. Then one day, my friend brought a bike back to camp. He said he bought it for \$60 from some dude that we had met hitchhiking. Then three days later, me and my other friend got back to our camp, and the bike and my friend were gone.

Then the cops stopped us and asked if we had lost a bike, and if we could describe it. I said that I thought my friend had lost one, and told him what it looked like. Then he said I was under arrest for grand theft. I was pissed.

When I told my public pretender, she said she would try to help me. Then she recommended me to six months probation. This is where the system lost my respect.

-Dead Fred

From The Beat: This is why we think this topic is so relevant and important, because it really shows just how ineffective the system can be when it deals with the lives of young folks. Yours is a sad story of injustice that we think needs to be heard and we are glad that you chose to speak on it through The Beat. We are curious if you have talked to any other attorneys or tried to appeal your case? Now that the system has lost your respect, do you feel obligated in any way to try and teach others about how the system works, or doesn't work, so that they don't have to go through what you have, or so that we can try to change the way it operates?

The system needs to be changed now. The pen and county needs to focus

What I Would Change About The System

I would change the part where you don't really get to see your family, and a lot more. Yes, my Probation officer and therapist have helped me. But they could have handled my situation better by giving me periodic time in the hall! Instead I'm in the Walden House hatin' edumacation, I need education!

-David

From The Beat: We are a lil' confused by your piece here David. Do you hate the way education is being handled at Walden House and want to go to a different school? Let us know because we really are interested in what you have to say. Maybe next time you can tell us how your PO and therapist have helped you.

The System: Unnecessary And Unlawful

I felt horrible when I was locked up. There was no control in my life. If the staff beat my ass, there was nothing I could do. Most staff get away with that shhh because they ain't gonna listen to a prisoner. There's no point in even writing a grievance cause there is no true justice in the system.

I remember one time a staff was talking foul to me and I told him he ain't nobody. He put me in a holding cell up front. I kicked the door and I kept making noise. Three staff came in and messed me up.

They slammed me on the floor and bent my arm back really far. They walked me down a long hallway with my arm bent behind my back. What they did was completely unnecessary and unlawful. I will never forget it.

-Warhead

From The Beat: Thanks for sharing what we know is a painful memory and story. Thousand of youth across the state are echoing the same story. It is our hope that in combination yours and others stories will reach the ears, conscience and heart of someone who can do something about it. Will that be a lawyer, judge or other government official? We can't call it. At the least we believe you have informed someone unaware of the realities of incarceration about what really goes on and why getting caught up or doing things to get caught up are not worth it.

There is spit, blood, semen and all kinds of other stuff on the walls in our cells. Tell me something, who would want to live in a place like this?

Getting Out The System

I'm getting out on April 10. I been in a program for three months, and I been locked up for two months. That's five months I been away from my family and away from females, you feel me? But I'm getting out in five days. You gotta feel me!

-Young Squeak

From The Beat: Oh, we feel you, all right. Congratulations, Young Squeak. We know that you deserve it. We hope that you stay out and discover that meaningful purpose in life that you been telling us about. Come check us out at The Beat Within office sometime.

When I Get Out Of The System

When I get out of here, one thing that I learned that I could teach someone is being locked up isn't what everyone makes you think it is. Being locked up is nothing fun. All you do is sit in a small room and have to ask to do anything.

-Bryant

From The Beat: We have been telling young folks that for years, so it encourages us to see someone like you realize this, and be able to spread that same message from someone who is locked up and knows the truth by living it. Lesson learned the hard way, huh? You're on the right track now, Bryant, so stay focused.

Incarcerated In The System

The word and label that comes to mind when I think of incarcerated people is stupid. The word stupid comes to mind because it's not cool to get locked up, it's stupid.

-Bryant

From The Beat: Is it stupid to get locked up, or is it stupid to do things that get you locked up? Or maybe the system is stupid for locking kids up? We hope that you might want to elaborate a lil' on this?

The System Plays Too Many Of Us

The system plays to many of us homeboys, whether it be crooked cops, COs or POs. For instance my uncle, when he went in state for his first time, he got sent to the yard by himself with no one else. Then they let out all his enemies and he got his ass beat and stabbed two times.

The system needs to be changed now. The pen and county needs to focus on rehabilitating instead of instigating, that's how I feel about the system.

-Anonymous

From The Beat: There's a lot of power in this short statement. We have colleagues who have experienced the same injustices, so we relate to this in a really moving way. The system has played too many of us. Isn't it about time we start trying to reverse that role? One way to do that is to keep from getting locked up in the first place. But for those who are locked up, what would a focus on rehabilitation look like? What programs would you put in place for that purpose?

Six Things To Change The System

I would change the three strikes law.

My P.O. has helped me because he gave me a lot of chances.

They could have gave me another chance and not have sent me to placement.

In a way it's hurting me because I'm away from my family.

I don't like not being free. I don't like the situation at all.

That the system sucks. Once you get in, it's hard to get out. There's always someone looking over your shoulder. When you make a little mistake you get violated. The D.A. will always be on you. My suggestions is don't get in the system in the first place.

-Jim

From The Beat: Every one of these suggestions is a good one. Of course, some of what you don't like is the very definition of jail — separation from what you love; losing your freedom. We agree that the best solution is not to get caught up to begin with.

Pepper Spray The System

One thing I would have to change about being locked up is the O.C. or pepper spray. The staff where I am from don't even care. They will spray you during reflection, just talking when you're supposed to be quiet. One kind of stuff is that. I guess I can understand if I get sprayed and then handcuffed, but getting sprayed until the O.C. can is empty, that's not right!

When I got handcuffed and took to the police station in San Diego, I was hit by two police officers for spitting in the police car. They had to put two spit socks on me. When they put the second spit sock on me, they choked me. My two homeboys that were in the holding tank next to me were also assaulted by police officers. They were punched and pushed off a bench that they were handcuffed to.

I think that the system is messed up. We need to stop the police brutality. I am not trying to be the innocent one because I was talking shhh to them, but that does not give the police the right to beat on juveniles.

The food in my juvenile hall is another thing I would like to change. I would like to change this because we get our food from the Donovan State Prison. The food is either nasty or too little of it. I found a plastic wrapper in my food before. It is unsanitary. There is spit, blood, semen and all kinds of other stuff on the walls in our cells. Tell me something, who would want to live in a place like this? I wouldn't, and that's why I chose to come to Walden House. As much as it doesn't seem like it, I am grateful to be here.

-Chris

From The Beat: What a powerful story, Chris. It pains us to see so many young folks having to go through what you did before they realize a better way of living, not to mention the fact that it makes us sick, frustrated and enraged to know that the police who are supposed to be helping and serving our communities are in many cases abusing and exploiting them. Your story is a perfect example of what we are trying to expose with this topic. Thank you for sharing it with and we hope that you find the help and support you need and want in your current program.

From The Beat: We think that you send out a strong message, and we hope that the youngstas that read this believe it. After all, it is coming from someone who has been there and done that [and, because of that, will not be there and do that again]. But, are you absolutely sure that your boy didn't commit the crime he was accused of? Would you stake your own freedom on it? What do you mean by "she wanted to have sex"? Did she say no but in your or his opinion that really meant yes? How do you know that she wanted to have sex?

From The Beat: This is the kind of message we hoped that this topic would inspire, and one of the very best we've seen. Now we hope that this, and other pieces like it, inspire those who read them to do something about the corruption and misuse of authority that exists in our system. Right on Paul, stay on point! If you ever decide to run for Governor, we'd vote for you!

From The Beat: The recent video exposing the guards in the Youth Authority beating an already handcuffed inmate backs up what you are saying here, and that is only one of the many cases we can point to as an example. We think that there should be more special monitors to oversee the system. Before we can change the system, though, we need to change ourselves. You are doing a good job of that, Paul, and we look forward to seeing some more of that potential being released.

From The Beat: That is off the hook Charlie! We are really proud to see this turn in your life in the right direction. We wish you all the success that you deserve and hope that you never forget these words so that you never lose that determination you have to be — AND STAY — free.

From The Beat: You know, even when Public Defenders like Patty Lee try to help, sometimes they fail. And sometimes they make mistakes, too, like we all do. We know a lot of Public Defenders who try to do their best, like she does. Sadly, we also know that there are those that we can't speak highly of. How would you change the way they work if you could? What do you think they could do better?

This hurt beneath my pumping heart. My flesh is shedding from all the time I have put in this group home and many more. Doing two years don't even count for the courts, and now I got to do more time for running from my last group home for two years and being treated like I was shhh. I didn't snitch cause that ain't me, but that ain't coo', though. One Love.

From The Beat: Maybe that is why the system locks up so many young people, to put them in an environment where they are encouraged to become even worse “criminals” and continue to make money off of you? That is one of the many ideas we have heard from other youth about the system. How do you feel though? Will you let them make you worse than you were before or are you determined to not be played and become something and someone better than a statistic? We agree that drug users should have other options than jail. And maybe other lawbreakers also need additional options. What kind of options would you consider?

From The Beat: Well, young homie, for beginners we think that the power with which you write this piece makes you somebody. What's more, we also think that you explained how screwed up the system is pretty well. What we don't read in this piece, however, is what you think could make it work better. If you were in charge, what would you put in place to improve things? How much time do you have left? Do you think that there is still time left for you to learn something about yourself? How is this for beginners: you know how messed up the system is so let that remind you of how much you value your freedom, and how stupid it would be for you to let them play you ever again.

One System Person Who Helped Me

(Dedicated to S-A-Y counselor Bob Ruffner)

He's been there through it all,
Stuck by my side when I took that hit,
When I ran away and threw a fit.
Sometimes I don't know the words to say,
To give thanks for all you've done.
But then they fly up and away as quickly as they come.
How could I possibly thank you enough?
The one who makes me whole,
The one to whom I owe my life
And the forming of my soul.
He's the one who helped me achieve my dreams,
When times are hard and nothings what it seems.
Even when I lied and disrespected,
You didn't get loud you just protected.
When I'm down
Or drowning in self-doubt,
All I have to do is call his name
And Bob will let me out.
He will never leave my heart
Even if we part
So once again I want to say
Thank you for everything
And most importantly for always being true.

-Brianna

From The Beat: What an outstanding piece to honor what sounds like a really great person. What county is Bob in? We would love to make sure that this piece gets into his hands. Keep on keep'n on Brianna. You are starting this program off on the right f

Tha System Holds Us Too Long

One thang I would change about the system is getting people up out of the system instead of keeping them in here longer, thinking they will eventually learn their lesson. I understand putting peeps in the program so they can get they life together, but at least give them a chance to do it on their own.

All the peeps that in the system keep yo' head up and jus' do you lil' program if you do get caught up.

Peace and Luv

-Angela

From The Beat: We feel you Angela. Locking people up and throwing away the key, as they say, is hardly an effective way to help people address the problems that they have and which gave rise to them committing crimes. Besides shortening the time here, can you think of any other improvements you would suggest for the system?

The System Helps Some And Oppresses Others

The system is displayed as rules and guidelines meant to help everyone.

In reality, the system's meant to help certain people and oppress the others. An example of this is even with drugs. The system makes it easier for the richer population than the poor. Crack and powder cocaine is the same thing. The only difference is crack is a lot cheaper. Knowing that most crack users are poor minorities, the sentencing for possession is a lot harder than cocaine.

-Jacqueline

From The Beat: You are right on point Jacqueline! True that the system's own rules and laws are contradictory and seem to serve one segment of society more than they do the other. Why do you think that is? What can we do about it? Is the system playing you, or are you playing the system?



Second Chances And The System

I think second chances should end if somebody is continuously breaking the same law. Of course the consequences should increase before they just shut it down and send us to jail or something. When you run outta chances, then you need to be basically sent to the Y to teach you a lesson.

People here at Walden House helped me dump much. Not all of them, but some of them. GG Bear, Tanisha, and Claudia helped me the most on working on my behaviors, but in the Hall umm... nobody really, because too much power is always corrupting staff there. They know that it's nothin and they can get away with it, so they just do what they do.

-Reese

From The Beat: Why do you think that sending someone to the Y would teach them a lesson? Exactly what lesson do you think it teaches? As of late there has been a tremendous amount of media coverage demonstrating how the Y does not help its detainees. In fact, your criticism of the Hall staff — that they have too much power which corrupts them — is even more true for the Y staff. The corruption there has made matters worse for many youth, and left many of them victimized. We certainly agree that putting too much power in a few hands tends to corrupt those hands, but how would you limit their power?

I understand putting peeps in the program so they can get they life together, but at least give them a chance to do it on their own.

Tha System Played Me

Tha system played me like a fool, and all I gotta say is I ain't coming back no mo'. So, forget da system! I'm out dis time fo' sho! Peace!

-Original One

From The Beat: Game recognize game. The system played you. Want some get back? Play the system! Don't fall in the traps you know that they set for you.

Being Locked In The System, What Comes To Mind

Well, to me what comes to mind when I think about people who are or ain't locked up is why did you do what you did to get there? Was it worth it? Would you do it again? I hope you want to change and not want to do the things you did when you put yourself there.

And for those who aren't locked up, don't make the same mistakes you made when you got locked up so you don't end up in jail or prison, or anywhere else.

Think before you do things. Don't let your actions put you where you don't want to be!

-Jennifer

From The Beat: Sounds like some real good advice. Mind sharing with us what it took for you to realize the value of this? All we can do now is echo these sentiments and encourage each one to teach one.

The thing I would change the most is that the court should worry less about making money and worry more about us inmates and incarcerated Human Beings!

The System Is An Awful Place

The system is an awful place. They play around with you and your court date. People really need to be more open and not punish us so hard.

I was put in juvenile hall for too long, only because the courts took too long. Now I'm in a rehab house.

The thing I would change the most is that the court should worry less about making money and worry more about us inmates and incarcerated Human Beings! I miss my family and friends from my hometown.

-B

From The Beat: We don't know if the court itself makes money off you sitting in the halls, but we do know that the halls themselves get paid ridiculously to keep you housed. What specific changes would you expect to see if the court worried less about making money and more about your welfare? Hopefully you stay out now and try to make some legit money for yourself rather than let the system make more money off you.



weekly writings

Black Jack, Lil' E, KG And Chunky

Black Jack: What's up with y'all younguns? How's life treatin' y'all in the Hall?
Kg: Man, damn. If it was treating me all right, I wouldn't trip off being here. What about you?
How you feel about the Halls?
Lil' E: Man, it's hell'a boring in here, cous'! This system don't be feeding me right in here!
Kg: Man, I feel everything y'all sayin'. But I'm glad I get out Sunday. Ya ninjas got Life with a chance of parole!
Lil' E: I'm getting out on April 6th. But if I don't, I'm gone... never mind. But I'm getting out April 6th, ninja.
Chunky: Well, I'm leavin' April 2nd, but if they April Fools me, it's cookies. When I leave, y'all better hold it down.
Black Jack: Oh, fa' sho'. But I don't think you leavin', E. Don't even think you gonna do nothin' when April 6th comes, and you don't leave!
Lil' E: I ain't trippin' if I don't leave. Dis my house, and y'all steady talkin' about it's weak, but y'all always spendin' tha night.
Kg: Well. What y'all sayin'? I'm getting out fo' show. Yo knooooow! But, anyway, just be glad you ain't in prison being somebody girl!
Chunky: You feel me? Y'all too soft to go to prison. Me, I could fend for my own. I would die before I get my manhood taken away. Don't end it.

-Chunky, Lil' E, Kg, Black Jack

From The Beat: Have you guys seriously considered another life for yourselves, one that will lead you away from the streets and away from prison? Don't get too comfy in Juvy, even though you get three squares, a clean bed and safety from the streets. Can you use Juvy as a place to breathe and plan a strategy for another life when you get out? Don't start to think of it as home, or it will become your home, not your home away from home!

Room Time -The Punishment Of Last Resort?

I would like to change being stuck in the rooms for hours to being a last resort. A kid should only go to their room if he is violent and can't get along with other kids. The rooms are concrete boxes and you can't signal in them to go to the bathroom.

The system ain't helpin' me or hurtin' me. The system is nothing compared to what people say. I hate the rooms and how you can't see anyone or say you have to go to the bathroom.

-Perry

From The Beat: What rumors about Juvy had you heard before you got locked up? Do you think that Juvy affects different people in different ways? Is it scary being locked in your room for hours? Do you have anything to read? To do? What do you think about when you're locked in your room for a long time?



Napa

The System

Hey lil' sis let me tell you about "the system." You wake up at 6:30 AM; you sweep your room and take a shower! By 7:00 AM you best be ready for breakfast. From 8:00 AM -12:00 PM you go to school. Juvenile hall school — you can't get much out of it! But you must learn something valuable! But hey...

-Carmen

From The Beat: What would you normally be doing during those times if you were on the outs? What do you think is the worst part of being in Juvenile Hall?

**Nobody ever taught
me how to steal, I
learned on my own
through trial
and error.**

Voice In Spanish

El Sistema Es Injusta

Q-vole Beat, soy el chino del Rancho. Yo empee a cometer crímenes a los 11 años con los homies. A mí nadie me enseñó como robar solito aprendí con marinidas y fracasos. Un día un amigo sacó un toque de yesca y comenzo a fumar, me lo pasó y fume. Me dio miedo esa primera vez, pero fue por el efecto de la grifa, pero después de unas semanas volvi a fumar y me gusto. Después de esta vez mi vida cambió, comence a rifar, y a caer torcido por pelear. Pero no me aguito.

Aquí los juices son culeros, especialmente los de San Francisco. En la juvenile, sólo habemos Hispanos, morenos y a los gabachos los dejan salir en unos días y teniendo casos serios. Todos somos iguales, nos deben de tratar igual. Para todos los homies torcidos, mantengan sus cabezas en alto.

From The Beat: Esperamos que dejes de andar usando grifa porque no te llebara a nada bueno. Te damos la razón sobre la igualdad. Todos somos iguales y debemos ser tratado de la misma forma. Pero te aconsejamos que nada de esto pasaria si no te hubieras metido en las garras del sistema.

The System Is Unfair

What's up, Beat? It's me Chino from the Ranch. I started to commit crimes at the age of eleven with the homies. Nobody ever taught me how to steal, I learned on my own through trial and error.

One day, a friend of mine pulled out a joint of some herb and started smoking it. He passed it to me and I smoked it. I was scared at first, but it was because of the dank. After several weeks passed, I smoked again and this time I liked it.

After this session, my life changed. I started gangbang and I ended up getting locked up due to fighting, but it did not get me down.

In here, the judges are marks, especially the ones from San Francisco. In Juvenile, there are only us Hispanics and Blacks, and as for White people, they let them go after a few days of incarceration, even if they have serious cases. We are all equal; we should get treated as equals. For all the homies who are locked up, keep your heads up high.

-Chino, LCRS

Property Crimes

The system is not the most thought-out thing. When a prisoner gets out and looks for a job, the prisoner can't get a well-paid job, they will need to fall in dirty cash or money with blood on it. So why put someone in for more than a few years for something that didn't hurt anyone, physically?

If someone dies by someone else, they should see if it was a gang thing or not a good reason to kill and kill them. But if it's a crime like stealing and no one was hurt or damages were not really high, then they should just serve five or less years in prison.

-Dj

From The Beat: Maybe you're right, DJ, but maybe you should have to pay for the damaged item you stole or broke, as well as a fine, and a minimum of confinement for "property crimes." If someone stole your car, that it took you five years of hard work to earn the money to pay for, and you never got the car back and you didn't have automobile theft insurance, what do you think would be the appropriate sentence for the youth that stole it? Also, if you execute a youth who commits first-degree murder, what is solved if you execute him? Why not give him a minimum twenty years, so he could have another chance someday?

I Earned My Way Here

Everything here is as good as can be expected, but not a lot is done to help reform the inmates. The food is good. Maybe some longer time in the shower.

But I earned my way in here. Why should I complain? I got a homie in Quentin. They need to clean that place up and solve the overcrowding. There is a lot of violence in there, and a lot of gang stuff. I hope he makes it out. Prison and stuff only puts bad people together.

-Self

From The Beat: Good for you for taking responsibility for being incarcerated, Self. What ideas do you have about the best ways to reform Juvy to help the youth establish alternative lives to their lives in the streets? Do you think most incarcerated youth are good, bad or both influences on each other? Do you learn anything positive, wonderful, sad, etc., from each other? What do you teach the other youth locked up with you?

Juvenile Ain't Sweet

I'm in Juvenile Hall
Surrounded by these walls
My mom, sister and dad miss me
And I miss them all
When I get out, I'm going to change my life

-Bad A

From The Beat: Great idea, Bad Ass! What would you like to change about your life? What kind of a life would you like to create? What do you need to do to educate yourself to get what you want? Does school help? What do you have to do, or not do, to get your new life?

**Prison
only puts
bad people
together.**

From The Beat: For this special issue on The System, we've dug back through our archives to reprint some of the most thoughtful pieces we've received on all aspects of the system over the years. Some of the true greats of The Beat Within are up in here: Gallea, Lil' Peti, Nick and Fish who were in our workshops at Alameda County; John, who not only represented out of SF/YGC but worked up in our office for a minute; even old schoolers Baby A and Dwayne the Knowledge are represented. There are so many pieces out there that we know we didn't get even the tip of the iceberg in here, but hopefully this will give all of you a picture of some of the pieces that have been dropped in the past on this topic.

Prison Reform

Seasons past
With no grasp on the last freedom,
Hit with two fast
The third the same as my last reason,
Is it fair to take my share?
Would you care if your individuality were bare
Stripped and torn as rapists stare?
If you were sitting
In my position
Would you make the same requisition
While my mama's tears drip
At my disposition?
To wonder what life's like
Outside these bars
You have seen my rap sheet
But have you seen these scars?
The city lights seem so far
It's been so long
Since I seen the stars
So many babies' names
On prison cards
And you support
The brutality that the law enforces
Using your tax money
For penitentiary endorsements
And people doing life
Taking college courses
While they're tearing down public schools
And destroying helpful resources
Is this a clear picture
For you, tourist, to see
Believe me, being surrounded by negativity
Abused and caged
To forget how it is to be free
It's not easy to be me
Serving long prisons terms
While hearts burn and bleed
Help prevent me from becoming
A product
Surrounded by lost souls
Dwelling in destructive conduct
Within these walls
Is a terrible storm
Where new inmates are born
And spirits are torn
Awaiting a much needed prison reform

-John

Alameda County Budget Cut

Ay, what's up, Beat? Tonight I'ma write about the budget cut in Alameda County Juvenile Hall.
I think back in 2000, if I'm not mistaken about the date, the county was talking about building a new Juvenile Hall. They were talking about building it in Dublin, California, right by Santa Rita County Jail, but I guess they're not going to build it there.

But now the county is making budget cuts to save money to build a new Juvenile Hall somewhere. So, here are some of the things we don't get like we used to: food, PE equipment, staff and good school programs.

For example, for breakfast we get a little box of cereal, a biscuit, a juice and maybe a piece of fruit. And lunch is basically the same. Or let's take PE equipment -- we have two basketballs in the unit for like thirty-eight people. Staff -- some staff are going to get fired 'cause of the budget cut.

And last but not least, school programs: Most of us sixteen-eighteen year olds know how to do sixth grade work! See, what I'm saying is that they are not teaching us nothing! So when we get back in school on the outs, it messes up our whole program, 'cause basically we're not learning nothing while we're here.

And another thing that's going to happen, is they're going to take like thirty-five beds out of Camp Sweeney! And there are only eighty beds right now -- so a lot of people are going to come back here (Juvie) to serve their time, or get released.

These budget cuts are really going to get worse, 'cause they're talking about having a food program like Santa Rita. When you wake up, you get your breakfast and two bag lunches for the rest of the day!

They're also thinking about having Alameda Sheriffs for staff! So if you get in a fight, they could whoop your ass, 'cause it's gonna be a hands-on program.

They're also talking about making a smaller indoor gym. I mean, it's already small, and they're talking about making it smaller! Man, they're going so far with this budget cut!

They're also sending more people to CYA. They're not trying to give most of us chances like they have in the past. I mean, they did give my brother, Goo Goo a chance, and I'm glad of that. Most people know that he's going back to Camp Sweeney.

And they did give my older brother Green Eyes a chance, but he ran and messed it up! He jumped out the county car and ran before he even got to his group home!

But my point is that three out of five people are going to the 'Y' (CYA), and it's all 'cause of the budget cut! Well, that's what we're talking about for this county. And I also heard that they're looking for a new owner for this Juvenile Hall. Well, I'm out till next time. So to all the homies in the system -- stay up!

- Lil' Speedy

**you support
The brutality that the law enforces
Using your tax money
For penitentiary endorsements**

Juvenile Hall

white halls go down a twisted hallway leading
to your future
chained up doors and wired fences cut off
every escape known
stuck in a room with no way to get out
you see: white walls, hard bed, barred window,
locked door . . . who wouldn't go mad?
as you walk down the hallway shadows
of what once was show themselves in their
numbered doors
at that moment you know that's what you'll
become: a numbered shadow
white walls,
hard bed,
barred window,
locked door
down the hall

-Nicole

Incarceration Death

this loneliness is tearing me up
like a razor to my face
the thoughts of survival have changed
my feelings about this place
the clicking of doors when they lock
haunts me in my dreams
the fact that i'm dying in here
makes me want to scream
the thoughts of freedom
strike like a heart attack
while the thoughts
of incarceration hit me
like bullets hitting my body
from a mini-mac
incarceration is not just punishment
it's more like murder
now my relationships with people on
the outs
are not getting closer but slipping away
even further
the thought of the pen
always seems to take my breath
because i'm currently experiencing
my incarceration death
(keep your heads up everyone)
i'm outtros

- Fish

**my point is that three out of five people are
going to the 'Y' (CYA), and it's all
'cause of the budget cut!**

Home

Six by eight feet is the area of my kingdom. My address is 08 Busta Role Ave, Max Unit, CA 03500. I have ruby red tiles, a light made of platinum, Gucci sheets, Versace pillowcase and blankets, and a very comfortable waterbed. I got all the writing paper I need, a library of five books, and I'm only allowed a pencil on good behavior.

My whole kingdom comes with a beautiful wall-to-wall mural of names and turfs, two windows -- one three-and-a-half-feet and the other four inches by one-and-two-thirds feet. The big one is on my wall, viewing a beautiful sight of trees and birds, while my little window has the view of my street and neighboring kingdoms.

Dust often builds up in my home, ants building up neighborhoods on my walls, and flies soaring through the air, feeding on ants and sleeping in my hair. Spit and stains on the corner to the right side of my kingdom entrance.

I live with an uncontrollable air system. My front door is only controlled to open and close from the other side. My restroom is used by the community. I have three phones, one is called the "straight-through phone" and the other two are payphones.

Let's teach our younger generation that this kingdom we're in is for demoniacal people and not for them. Don't take my words lightly!!

-Fish

Alone

Seventeen years old, feels like my life is wasted
Stuck in a dark cold room feels just like a basement
Every placement I attend just doesn't work out
No one understands exactly just what I'm about
I open my mouth but I just can't seem to talk
I try to defend myself but my lips are sealed and locked
The judge looks at me like
I'm some kind of murderer
I want to tell them what's up but I'm so unsure
What do I say to convince them that I'm sane?
They think I'm crazy; I'm just full of guilt and shame
They don't know me for me, how I truly can be
They just know me by my records that they put on me
I'm a good person, I don't deserve a year for this
But they don't understand, I'm not even halfway through it
I still got a year to a year and a half left
That's what makes my hope cold
and makes me a living wreck
It's hard to get through it
because my hope just fades
I wake up everyday
but it gets harder to hide the pain
But they can't keep me here forever
I didn't murder anyone
I just can't wait to get out, to see that shining sun

-Socrates

That's Incredible

It's incredible how unjust this system is. Actually, to me, it's more than just incredible; it's to the point of ludicrous. I've been in this max unit for half a year now, and you can't imagine how many guys that get incarcerated for something they didn't do just because people begin pointing fingers, the police are so quick to be doing what they do best. Throw you in and throw away the keys. They don't even try to see if you did it or not. And they go around acting like they are society's heroes.

They don't even have the slightest idea of the crisis they bring upon the person and his family. After the police do their job, they hand it down to the DA. The DA then begins giving charges that are unheard of. Then they turn their role around and act like they cutting you some slack by giving you bizarre bargains. What's so incredible is that even innocent people break down and take stuff they don't even deserve. But me, hell no, I'm taking my stuff to trial. I'm one person they can never break down.

-Me

**This is why I tell you to
get an education
Become a lawyer get
paid by the hour,
straight hunds
A lawyer with a
briefcase can steal more
money then 10,000
men with guns**

Are You Playing Them Or Are They Playing You?

The American Government aka the system

ya gotta love it

and ya gotta buy insurance

'cause everybody needs coverage.

Where companies like Enron rob the world blind
the media — CNN, ABC, Fox — control the country's mind.

Ball and chain strapped to their ankles
the poor struggle behind.

America, the country that fights
wars for the benefit of private corporations
or sings treaties and supports racist nations.

The country ruled by the dollar
a green piece of paper.

A place where if you don't have money
you might as well be made of vapor
the government looks right through ya
there isn't any love.

Run by poli-tricks, the President's the big pimp
backed up by police thugs.

The rich have many options.

The poor have never chose.

The rich born in the nation's cradle.

The poor born at the death or prison crossroad.
Uncle Sam making money off of blood spilled

the people's leaders stay alive
revolutionaries get killed.

Nike commercials and the NBA
got poor children dreaming of mills
while the parents work two and three jobs

trying to pay the bills
working hard making do with
what is given

while their teenage boys see
death or prison in their vision.

One hundred-fifty dollar Nikes, case of Budweiser,
wit' blunts of weed, it's all coo'

but I got a question for you —

are you playing them or are they playing you?

-Dwayne The Knowledge

Life Now

Up early in the morning at the crack of sunrise

Watching through the window as life slowly passes me by
Thinking of all the wasted opportunities and all the wasted time

Everything was sweet at first, now it's sour like a lime

No love from my family, homies dropping dimes

There ain't nothing easy in this life of crime

Got to be strong mentally or you'll lose your mind

Bodies dumped in places, police can't find

Paper chasing got me posted 24-7 on the grind

To hell with everyone else, I'm trying to get mine

Busting, riding on enemies, hitting fences on the one time

Game so strong I can sell sunglasses to the blind

Drunk driving, police behind me, not pulling over,
can't walk a straight line

Any fool mess with my scrilla he through, even my own kind

And I know I'm wrong and this is a bad way of life

Everyday questions, will I go home, have a baby and a wife?

Got to handle this time, nobody said this game was nice

That's why I be everywhere, worldwide like lice

Or locked down getting swoll off bread, chicken and rice

All in a brotha's pockets like lint

Brothas see me get scared, and strike like a flint

I'm old school, grab the weapon, and dump like Clint

And there's no evidence left

Told you I'm about my cheddar cheese, everything else is irrelevant

I'm this way for the simple fact that I'm high and bent

You know the saying if it don't make dollars, it don't make sense

That's why I sell dope, rob and pimp

Always on guard ready to attack like a pit

Savage like a Kimono Dragon when it comes to my stacking

On the block, beating fools down like Tekken

Or packing and sporting a flak jacket

Homies turned against me so everybody now catches havoc

Ride through my own set, hanging out the window doing my thang

Before it even starts, I put an end to all static

Kilo's in the basement, shamrock hung to dry in the attic

Thinking money money, green green,

Young Knowledge got to have it

Trying to retire and live life lavish

In a big body Benz, Bentley, and Jaguar,

drunk driving, straight smashing

High siding Young Knowledge

Was out there snatching money bags in organized crime fashion

Now that I'm locked down, "will I change now?" is all they askin'

They say God's waiting for me when I reach my casket

And if I change now, my life will be everlasting

I'm really thinking hard on my situation 'cause at night I'm haunted by flashes

I got a question for you young soldiers,

what you gon' do when this game becomes drastic?

When yo' family's gone, friends gone, mom's gone, and leave you all alone
You try to call collect, they know it's you calling and don't answer the phone
You write your mom, they send the letter back, it's no longer your mom's home

See, these type of things that happen when your facing

hella time could drive you insane

Don't want to witness this, then don't be like Dwayne, better change

All this I talk about is all part of this devious sick game

And you can either live in eternal sunshine or in eternal flames

I know you saying, "I'll be the exception and it won't happen to me."

Well young homie, that's exactly how I used to think

Now I'm locked down, facing about 60 years in the penitentiary

And after 16 years, the troubles of this game is finally hitting me

It hit me right in the face, all in my nose, and it really stinks

Homie believe me, I was one of the best, one day, you will get caught

And they'll stick you in a stank ass cell to sit and rot

When I say "they," I mean these politicians that run the country

Who make money off locking you down

and don't care that you're hungry

You out there protecting their land, your block is their territory

They sit back wit' smiles and call yo' gang stupid and funny

You want the scribble so you slang, pimp, murder or pull off a robbery

They know this so they let you get it,

then raid and take all the money

Now you locked down, no cash, no attorney,

they laugh and call you a dummy

This is why I tell you to get an education

Become a lawyer get paid by the hour, straight hunds

A lawyer with a briefcase can steal more money than 10,000 men with guns

Homie I beg you to change, go to school and learn

If not for me, for yourself, so you can keep all the cash you earn

'Cause in a life of crime, all you get is burned

That's how it goes down in the end

There's no mom, dad, family or friends

Change now my friend, 'cause your life you can still mend

Stop the pain before it really begins

Stick to yo' fam, lose all the wanna be friends

I'm telling you 'cause this game can really blow yo' mind

Especially, when your locked down facing hella time

'Cause how you gon' handle that situation?

When it's no longer J Hall, Ranch or CYA time you facing

And don't be mad at me, I'm just life lacing

Telling you the real about the lifestyle you chasing

Don't be blinded by the truth, I'm not trying to be macing

And don't think I'm a joke 'cause I ain't playing

'Cause I'm out, I hope you were listening to the words

That I was saying and heard my growl

'Cause this is my reality, my life now

-Dwayne The Knowledge

In A Cell

In a cell, tears fall from a minor's eyes,
But when he comes out, he puts on a disguise
He has fun at rec, but no one could tell
He lays on his bed and his tears made his pillow wet
But he would hide his weaknesses
And change his pillow at rec

In a cell, another minor is punching his wall
He punches so much until his knuckles are gone
He figures his life is over 'cause his time is long
He prays to tell God that he knows he's wrong
He feels God isn't listening so he punches even more
He gets tired of that, so he starts kicking his cell door

In a cell, a minor is writing a letter to her friends
She writes to her man and friends again and again
Without a pencil and paper, she's all alone
She asks her friends

Why don't they answer their phones?
She tells her man it's nothin' to her
But when she writes it, tears start to occur

In a cell, another minor is singing in her room
She sings so many songs and so many tunes
She sings so time could go by quick
If she doesn't sing, her body becomes sick
She sings and doesn't mind if people laugh
As long as her times passes by fast

In a cell, a minor is bargin' on his wall
He makes the beat come from the song
He starts to rap and freestyle with the beat
He'd rather rap than to sit down and read
He bangs too much, so staff says, "Get off!"
So he stops 'cause he figures that's enough

In a cell, a minor is prayin' to the Lord above
He asks him to please let the judge show him love
He prays that God will help him get out
He asks him to help him take another route
He begs the Lord on both of his knees
He ends after he asks Him to bless his family

In a cell, a minor is reading a book
He reads about Peter Pan and Hook
He doesn't want to read about non-fiction stories
He believes that real life is boring
He wasn't taught very well when he was young
He doesn't read about Pan and Hook
He looks at the pictures 'cause he's dumb

In a cell, every minor is quietly sleeping
Being incarcerated, going to sleep is the best feeling
They're laying in their beds not thinking of their problems
There is loss, they dream that they don't got 'em
You hate waking up, you're addicted to yo' sleeps
'Cause you rather stay asleep and lost in yo' dreams
One love....

-Lil' Peti

To This System: Give It Back

Give me my life back that you took from me
I don't want to be here, I rather have freedom to keep
You took it in less than a quick minute
Did no thinkin', you just seen me and did it
Took my life away wit' no chance to be free
You just locked me up and threw away the key
Give back the happiness and joy I had
You turned my life from good to bad
I was living it right like I was a king
But you took my freedom, love, you took everything
You played a game on me, you played me like a foo'
Now my happiness is gone, I feel only down and blue
Give back my mind that I used to think wit'

Now it's worthless, a piece of shhh
It used to be normal now it's all abused
You played mental games, my mind was misused
I can't think right anymore, my mind is spinning
You take in everything, why can't you stop stealin'
Give me back all my opportunities and chances of mine
The only opportunity you gave me was doin' time
I wanted to be a heart surgeon or pilot

I'll never know about planes and how to fly it
I wonder if those opportunities will ever come back
'Cause I was on the right road, but you put me off the track
Give me back my education that I'm supposed to get
I'm in the eleventh, but you gave me third grade work instead
I'm learning the same thing in third grade in this facility
How can I work to the best of my ability?

Do I look uneducated to you 'cause I come from the 'hood?
You're underestimating my knowledge and that ain't no good
Give it back to me, everything you took
My life, opportunities, and including that math book
I want it all back right now, on the spot
I know you hate this 'cause yo' head is gettin' hot
Give it back, give it back, give it back to me
Thank you very much and I don't except yo' apology

-Lil' Peti

**In a
cell, a
minor is
reading
a book
He
reads
about
Peter
Pan and
Hook**

Court Day, The Day I Became An Adult

January 27, 2004 at 10:30 AM. It's a rainy, depressing day and court is in session. The DA calls the victim's grandmother to the stand.

"Raise your right hand. Do you swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth?" "I do."

"Miss, what kind of injury did your grandson receive?"

"He received a broken skull in six places and the size of the injury is four by six inches, and about the side of the inside of my hand."

"How many surgeries has your grandson received?"

"He had six surgeries."

"Is he scheduled to have any more?"

"Yes, he is."

"What kind of surgery is he supposed to have?"

"They're supposed to replace the missing brain tissues with a manmade object."

"What is the injury covered up with?"

"Skin and hair."

"What would happen if he accidentally hit his head?"

"It could be life-threatening."

"Is he able to care for his self in anyway?"

"No, he is not. He has to wear a helmet throughout the whole day. The only time he doesn't have to wear it is when he is sleeping."

"I have no further questions, your honor. Thank you Miss. You may step off the stand."

My attorney calls my PO to the stand. "Do you swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

"I do."

"Miss, do you believe my client should be trailed as a juvenile?"

"I believe he can benefit from CYA. He would be able to finish school and get into some job training, and he would be required to take substance abuse classes."

"Do you think my client lived an adult lifestyle?"

"No I do not. I believe he lived a juvenile lifestyle."

"Do you believe substance abuse was a big part of my client committing his crime?"

"Yes I do."

"Thank you. I have no further questions, your honor."

"Counselor, are you ready to go forward with the hearing?"

"Yes, your honor."

"After reviewing the behavioral background study, I find the minor fit under criteria 1 of the 5 criteria. I find the minor fit under criteria 2. I also find the minor fit under criteria 3 and 4. However under criteria 5, where it states the minor committed a random act of violence, I find the minor unfit. The minor doesn't pick out victims, he gets who's ever in sight and that makes him a big threat to society. So therefore, I find the minor unfit for juvenile court treatment. He shall be remanded to adult court and processed there."

Boom! Boom! Court is over.

I am no longer a teen. I am a grown man as of January 27, 2004. It's all about the big time now. There ain't no steppin' back. It's all about going forward. There is no looking back.

I thank you Lord for another day. So please give me the strength and power to endure this storm of my life.

-Nick

**Now my
happiness is
gone, I feel only
down and blue
Give back my
mind that I used
to think wit'**

Click, Click At My Door

It's kind of weird knowing I was just sleeping on my bed at home knowing it was just a dream. Once I hear "click, click" at my door, I know all my good thoughts will fade away quick. I wake up at 7:00 AM to eat breakfast, really quiet, not saying anything to anybody because I would just like to be dreaming about being home once again.

After breakfast they bring us our hygiene tray to our cell and with our sink in the room, that's what we use to brush our teeth with. After hygiene we have like one hour to get ready to go to school. I sit in my cell and just think a lot about what I'd be doing if I was home, and what I could've done to prevent myself from coming here.

During that full hour I put my back on the wall and just daydream. I got to a point where I just daydream and actually feel like I'm in a place I'm thinking of. I stand up from the corner cell wall I was just leaning on and lay on my bunk, and try my best to close my eyes, wishing I could just wake up and not end up where I'm at now. I'm in peace again in my own world in my cell, back at home. Then again, "click, click," I see my dream slowly fade away because I'm waking up again, and my eyes slowly come to a blur waking up in my cell.

For the second time in one day, I hear another "click, click" to the door of my cell because I'm taking too long to actually open the door to my cell. I pop my head out the door to my cell, and tell the staff, "I'm just gonna stay in my room." Everybody knows if you refuse school you only get an hour out and you can't come out the rest of the day. A staff notifies me about that. And I agree to it 'cause I just wanted to lie down and go back in my own world I was just dreaming about.

I walk slowly back to my bunk pushing the door closed behind me and hear a small click at my door knowing they just locked it. I lay on my bunk slowly putting my head on my pillow whispering to myself, "Damn, I can't believe I'm locked up." But I move a lot on my bunk trying my best to go back to sleep as I slowly drift into my dream. I'm Free. I'm home playing Nintendo with my little brother. I blink my eyes rapidly trying to figure out if I'm dreaming, but I'm not. "I'm home," I say to myself. I start picturing myself walking around with my headphones on my ear, hearing music, and doing all the fun stuff I normally do when I'm out like cruising around, eating out at my favorite restaurant (Jack-In-The-Box), taking a nice long shower, and even watching TV whenever I want. But all those good thoughts fade away as I hear a "click, click" at my cell door.

I put my pillow over my head, trying to ignore the loud clicking sound at my door. As I hear another "click, click" at my door, I throw my blanket over my head still trying to ignore the clicking sounds at my cell as I get up from my bunk and slowly rub my eyes to try and wake up.

I open the door to my cell and see that it's lunchtime and there's a tray right outside my door. As I look at the bright lights outside my door, I rub my eyes once again before I pick up my tray. As I walk back towards my bunk closing the door behind me, I sit on the floor against my cell and look at my food, not wanting to eat or even bother looking at my food. I begin to start eating . . . still very quiet . . . still thinking about all the things I was dreaming about when I was asleep. I finish the last piece of food I have on my tray and get up from the corner of my cell to wash my hands and use the bathroom.

When I'm finished, I start washing my hands again and look into the mirror of my sink and try to picture my old self when I used to be out. But now seeing myself, and my hair that hasn't been cut for over three months, it's hard to recognize myself in my own mirror. As I pour water down my face, I get a little frustrated and toss water at my mirror and see drops of water slowly pouring down from my cracked mirror that I just decided to hit. Sometimes I feel like being a little kid and just start crying. But I hold myself back because I know I made my own mistakes and this is the consequence I have to live with.

I take a strong look at the bruised hand on my right arm with pain like something's bouncing against it. And all of a sudden before I have a chance to go sit on my bunk, I hear "click, click" at my cell and it's time for me to put my tray out side of my room. I pick up my tray with my left hand because my right hand still pounds with pain and slowly open my door and put my tray outside my cell. As I turn around to head back to my home, I close the door behind me and dive onto my bed just wanting to go back to sleep. I lay there turning left and right trying my hardest to keep my eyes closed but can't seem to fall asleep. I finally decide to just keep my eyes opened and facing towards the ceiling of my cell from my bunk, and still not saying a word.

As I hear the staff members start announcing on the speakers the people that need to start getting ready for court, I jump up out of my bunk and look out the small window of my cell and see some of my good friends lining up getting ready for court to hear good news or even bad news. I yell to some of my friends out the crack of my door, and shout, "Good luck and just have faith." Some turn and say gracias and some are just scared to even hear what the judge is going to say. As they walk in a straight line slowly moving together, I see some anxious faces turning back to nod their head at me and some with big smiles on their face just waiting to go to court. I see them all drift off within a couple of seconds letting the side door shut loudly behind them.

I turn around and see some of the pictures on my wall of my family and pick one of them up and just kiss it and say, "Sorry mom." I see a tear running down my face and it drops on my mother's picture I was just holding. As I wipe the tears from my face, I slowly put my family's picture down and wonder how far it will be till my next court date.

After a couple of minutes of just thinking, I take my shirt off to start my daily

exercises. I stretch out a little and begin to start doing pushups till my shoulders are worn out. Then switch over to sit-ups till I feel my sweat pouring down hard into my own eyes and start doing different exercises to let out all my anger I have inside of me. As two hours go by from just pure exercises, I could feel the sweat through my hair and a burning feeling of sweat entering my eyes. I get up and walk straight towards my sink to drink water and pour water on my face from all the sweat on my face and look at the cracked mirror I had hit earlier that day and take a glance at my right hand to see if the swellings gone down, but it hasn't.

I hear a big door slam outside of my room knowing by now that it should be the people coming back from court. As I glance out my window, I see some of my friends with tears in their eyes and some with big smiles on their faces knowing they're gonna get released later on today. And as I see some of my friends walking by my cell I ask, "What happened?" Some put their head down and say "CYA, two years." Some are happy that they're only gonna stay here two months. And the ones with tears are sad because they're gonna stay or get sent somewhere they never thought they would go.

As I turn around, I hear other cell doors closing and some slamming with all the anger that they have inside them. And as soon as I walk back towards my bunk, I grab my towel and wipe all the water from my face and lay down feeling tired. I start daydreaming about being out with my eyes still open without a single blink in them. I snap out of it and start counting the bricks on the wall and find out that there's two thousand and fifty three bricks in my whole room.

As a couple of hours go by, I hear a "click, click" at my door and wonder what they want. As I open my door, I see the bright lights shining on my drowsy eyes. I see that there's a tray right outside my door and realize it's dinnertime already. I grab it with my left hand 'cause of my right hand still bruised up from hitting my mirror earlier in the day, but as I close my cell door behind me, walking towards my bunk, I hear a big "click" knowing they just locked my door.

I sit down on the corner of my cell eating my food as quick as I can because I start to feel tired and I just want to sleep. I finish my meal, stand up and grab my tray with my left hand and put it next to my door. After that I walk straight towards my sink and use the bathroom. As soon as I'm finished, I wash my hands and begin to dry them off with my towel.

I walk towards my bunk and lie down and move around my bed till I finally fall asleep. This time, I'm getting released, walking out of here with a big smile and knowing I'm finally gonna go home. I'm on the freeway on my way home seeing all kinds of different cars pass by me. As I head towards the first exit of Paso I'm heading into town. A place I used to hang around at and also a place where I've messed up my life and all of a sudden I hear a "click, click" in my head and my dream slowly starts to blur away.

I open my eyes slowly and try to put my pillow over my head to avoid the clicking sounds at my door. I wake up and open my door and grab my tray and bring it out with me. I see the bright lights burning my eyes and hear the staff ask me if I want my hour out and I say no. I head back towards my room and close the door behind me and see that it's dark out of my window.

I have pieces of pencils in my room hidden around all over my cell. I get some paper and just start writing about all my dreams and how it feels to wake up knowing my life is in my cell.

I've been here seven months and do the same thing every day. Some people even trip out because they never see me come out of my cell. I do everything I said on a day-to-day basis. It's kind of weird waking up knowing I'm still locked up. I've learned a lot being locked up though.

During every day that goes by, I think about was it worth getting locked up. No, I've tried my best not to end up in a cell like this, but I could see that I'm not trying hard enough to stay out?

So what does that mean? Keep your head up and never give up on yourself because we don't fall, we just give up.

But I'm hearing the most annoying noise I've ever heard. "Click, click." It's time for showers and by the time I get back, lights will be out and I won't be able to write. But this is my everyday life in my cell.

Lastly, thanks Beat Within. I've let out things I never thought I could explain in my own words, and I thank you for that.

Much love.

-Jesse

The System

Some people say that a synonym for the system is wisdom
But they're wrong

The only things cops can do is take kids' bongs
Funny how no tickets are given to females sportin' thongs

If I worked at McDonald's, I'd spit in their fries
Soon cops will be the ones doin' drive-bys

Every morning they put on a uniform as a disguise
Screw this bullshh mockery

It's all one big global mockery
But what stops the cops from hittin' me

Still end up in court with no sympathy
If evidence points to innocence still no pity

They treat presidents as they're the key to survival
But they're pilots flying us into death with our rivals

We learned nothing from the past, we're still hella primal
I think it's pitiful

That the judges leave their ego on top of a pinnacle
Still the man has the nerve to call me a criminal

As if my sentence is hella critical
All I can do is listen

My faith keeps goin' like a well-greased piston
All will be good in the future

My soul will glisten
Only if I follow one condition

That only clean urine is what I'll be pissin'.

-Neil

I turn around and see some of the pictures on my wall of my family and pick one of them up and just kiss it and say, "Sorry mom."

CYA Today

I am once again to be blessed to be able to write in The Beat Within, as I am once again in Juvenile Hall. I have been given a vacation from my violent, lonely and more often than not mentally shaking daily routine from YA. I have come back for a restitution court day and am ecstatic, 'cause tonight I am able to bring knowledge to your minds about YA. I will try to extinguish all falsehoods you have heard about YA. I am speaking firsthand, as I have been a ward of CYA for a year and a half, with three more years of my sentence to go.

No, people do not get stabbed in YA, but yes, people do get hit with rocks, locks, or soaps deposited in socks. Yes, there are riots between organizations and races who have had minor incidents escalated into a twelve-on-fifteen man riot in the sleeping area. There are routinely riots of mass proportions, due to all the stress and emotional distress people carry within until they get a chance to vent their anger on the bodies of a man who they don't know, but are brainwashed to believe they hate.

Yes, you do come out for one hour of rec in a cage that you can barely do calisthenics in; only if you are in lock up, though, are you submitted to that. But you must see the good that rivals the evil, as is always the case, no matter where you are in the world.

People are not always so violent in here. Some people are taking correspondence classes to try to further their education, so they will have a chance when they end their bid of incarceration. Some have the luxury of staying up 'til nine o' clock at night before having to end their day by relenting to the truth that they are once again going to sleep next to sixty-nine other boys who are also in the predicament of being locked up.

Some have the luxury of being able to sleep on a single bunk which equivocates to a twin-sized bed, instead of being on a triple bunk feeling like sardines locked away, barely being able to turn over and lay on your side if you're a big person; knowing that the correctional officer who reigns for the day can move you to a bunk with more space, yet they laugh, literally laugh in your face as you ask them if you can move to another bunk and they seem to revel in your discomfort and anxiety as you try to go to sleep, looking at a gray slab of steel less than eight inches from your face, bringing back flashbacks of standing against a wall as you're being searched, bringing nightmares of being trapped in a box, or better yet a coffin, the same shade of monotonous gray as you've so often seen in prison movies on HBO, Showtime, or some other cable channel not accessible in the YA.

And yet that which I just describe is supposed to be the better side of incarceration, if there ever was such a thing, in all the time jails and prisons have been around. There is no escape from incarceration, there is only a chance to redeem yourself by education, meditation, or assimilation with your surroundings as a chameleon can blend in, but not necessarily effect your surroundings, just trying to survive one day to another and not get entrapped in the unwritten rules of conduct that all institutions have that vary from cell block to cell block, lodge to lodge, and hall to hall. Trying to escape all ridicule from other inmates as well as trying to squash rumors of you being in jail for an intolerable crime considered sick and inhumane by even the man eight rooms down who's there for a triple homicide and dismembering the bodies. Trying to survive and get paroled as soon as possible by any means necessary, excluding all that may get you hurt while you are still in the vicinity of criminals with a warped sense of community, ready and willing to sacrifice any and everything for the next man they call their homie.

As my closing statement I can try to persuade you into leaving the street life alone, but I can only try. I am a living example of the system trying to change a crazy person into an upstanding citizen, yet it is only up to me in the end as well as it is only up to you to change your mind.

If you are coming to the Y, you just got a heads up and you now know what to expect. It's on you to change and hopefully you won't be the next newest addition to the never-ending story. So once again I'm saying be safe and stay out of trouble.

-Gallea

**I am a living
example of
the system
trying to
change a
crazy person
into an
upstanding
citizen**

**Santa Clara
County does
not give youth
a chance to
change.**

The System

What I would say about the system is what every youth feels about being incarcerated — it's wrong! I'm not saying this out of hate for the juvenile system, but only for the fact this is true.

The juvenile system was supposed to have been built to rehabilitate youth, supposed to better them as a person. But now all it does is punish kids and strip them of their self-pride and a chance to succeed. I say this because of two reasons.

Santa Clara County does not give youth a chance to change. When a gang member is brought to court, the judge and district attorney look at him with hate. He will be judged the moment he is looked at as a no good thug, and because of this he will face their idea of "justice." They don't care what kind of person he really is, or what kind of great talent he has; they don't care that he has a mother and father or a family that loves him very much. They don't take into consideration that if given the chance he could become some one and succeed in life. They look down on him as a useless thug who wants nothing but violence and crime.

The way the system judges our youth plays a big role in the problems we face in the community today. That youth makes himself believe — because of the actions of the system — that the system and society are out to hurt him in some way. So because of this, he withdraws from society and has no respect for the ways of the system, so now he's looked as a criminal.

Second because of Prop 21, the law that has condemned so many youth.

-Siclone

Boring Routine On The Unit

Click-click

"wake up hey you alive
okay good wash up seven minutes"
i sleepily begin my day by opening my tired eyes
i was just having a wonderful dream that i could fly
sitting on my bed still half asleep i wish it was true
then i could fly into the open blue
brushin' my teeth then quickly washin' my face
check the clock 'cause with time it's a race
staff always bother me 'bout brushin' my hair
but the way i look you can tell i don't care
now i just make my bed open air

Click-click

"square it up" staff 'bout to structure us
they tellin' the same advice every single day
"today is serious so don't nobody play"
now it's breakfast so stand by a table
say grace and "talking is dead"
eating this nasty food is getting to my head
luckily for me DB brings food for level three's
so i tear up the real food that's given to me

"Check-ins"

you wanna know how i feel
i feel like shhh and that's for real
this is always our daily routine
every day it's always the same exact scene
school, group, and school for a second time
so hurry up and let's get in line
the time passes slowly but finally it's lunch
soup of today is yesterday's meal
looking like it could kill
well after finishing my killer soup
again it's time for a useless group
"take it down shift change"

Go to my cell now
click

and stare at the wall
hopin' today my mom accepts my collect call
i use this time to think of all the drama in this unit
thinkin' how can i get out of here -- what do i do
i wanna go back to the unit with ms. wadud
if i'm lucky and i finally fall asleep

I get woken up
click-click

"time for 1 ME"

pm shift like to play these little games
but every day it's just the same
"fifty jumping jacks let's do it together"
all i wanna do is enjoy the weather
now we gotta do this stupid little race
i stay i can't run so i exercise in place

Get ready for showers

click
now they got me waiting in a little robe
waiting my turn and shivering 'cause it's hella cold
see if i'm not ready for my shower
they could take away my rec' -- staff got that power
after my shower, which is cold 'cause i'm usually last
a lot of time has already passed
whatever time of the day that we have left
we use that as the daily rec'
we stay out for about an hour or two
at eight forty-five pm we know what to do
"square it up and take it down
lose your rec' tomorrow if you clown"

Bored . . . waiting now for last head call
click-click
last thing for today
so take my time in the hall

Back to my room
click
with a good book
till i see in my window a well-known look
"lights out"
click

Nothing to do now
just wait for tomorrow morning
as i fall asleep i think
man this is hella boring
ZZZZZZZZZZ
wake up suddenly
there's someone tapping on my head
"wake up go take your meds"
same thing as yesterday
"serious so don't play"
standing on my square now
just listening to what needs to be said
but i got to end this here
'cause "talking is dead"

-Snow

All It Takes Is One

All it takes is one woman and one man to create a baby girl
 All it takes is one major drug deal to go bad
 And that baby girls' dad's pad turns into a cell
 All it takes is one no-good drug
 To turn that baby girls' mom
 From a profiteer to a customer
 All it takes is one call from teachers to CPS reporting that the woman isn't
 keeping herself
 And the little girl in good shape
 For them to take the girl away
 All it takes is one long five years
 Without real blood family
 Verbal and physical abuse
 For that little girl to lose hope
 And stop talking
 All it takes is one sister
 To find the little girl
 For her to come back alive again
 And be taught how to fight back
 All it takes is one CPS worker
 To find out about the reunification
 And split us up
 For that girl to put in her mind
 That people are working against her happiness
 All it takes is one little girl
 To turn into a teenager
 And try to make ends meet herself
 All it takes is more than one time
 Of being shut down by people
 For her to build up a protective shield
 So no one could come close
 Just to hurt her
 All it takes is one too many times
 People telling this girl she's wrong
 Take people she loves
 Send her out of her familiar surroundings
 Put her in foster homes, group homes
 Juvenile Halls, hospitals, facilities, etc.
 For her to become a cold-hearted bitch

-Shannon

The Place Given

Every day I do what I have to do
 to prepare myself to face grown men, grown foo's
 men without hope, without love, without friends,
 with nothing to lose
 men who are near perfect physically,
 but mentally they're a bunch of loose screws
 they live like animals in the jungle,
 without any laws or rules
 except of course, the rule of silence
 to keep your mouth shut, to never speak on either drugs or violence
 where God only exists among a few, and only those few ever repent
 this is the place where the worst of society is sent
 a place a person is to give up all thoughts of the world outside
 thoughts that will break you down, and make you cry
 that will make you regret every foolish act you made for your pride
 where I'm going I have to be prepared both physically and mentally
 so I told the only girl I've cared for, possibly loved,
 to no longer write to me
 not to waste her time because I'm going to the penitentiary
 most of you say, so what, she wasn't going to wait anyways
 but she loved me, like I loved her,
 and would have waited 10,000 days
 this you say is not true, I'm fooling myself
 I've thought the same thing,
 so it's over now to protect my mental health
 now that I've mention it,
 if you're in max, you've noticed I never get a visit
 this is what my family believes will help
 with my preparation for prison
 to get used to not receiving hugs and kisses
 but to only expect the acceptance of a few phone calls,
 and occasional letters full of good wishes,
 this is a place I wish none of you see
 this is the place if you ever wondered where "Knowledge" is
 this is where I'll be
 this is a place that's never chosen, but given
 a place where people who couldn't function in society
 is sentenced,
 a place full of men who are Norteños, Sureños
 Bloodin' and Crippin',
 where the strongest and hardest of gangsters get caught slippin',
 this is a place known as San Quentin, Corcoran, Soledad, Pelican Bay and Folsom
 State Prison.

-Dwayne The Knowledge

What the Hall Has Done To/For Me

I've been in the Hall since February and I can honestly say that I've gained a lot more knowledge this time around. Not only that, but I've become a man up in here.

What's my definition of a man? A man is someone who takes full responsibility of what he does. A man respects those who respect themselves. A man doesn't slouch on mental strength or physical strength. A man is a master at manipulation. A man can stand on his own two feet. A man could care less what the next person thinks about him. A man is a warrior of death. Naturally a man doesn't know right from wrong, but a man does realize what is right or wrong for himself. No disrespect to the next person, I'm knowing that each individual has their own presentiment of what a man is. This just happens to be my opinion.

I remember just last night a counselor mentioned to me that basically I'm ahead of my time, and to top it all off, I haven't even reached my full potential. Honestly, he had me flabbergasted, because in a nonegotistical way, I agree, and I'm positive that a number of people would choose not to argue with that fact.

I'm on another level so to speak. My intention is to be a teacher so people can say that I was one of the chosen few who got tangled up in the system, but eventually found a way to get untangled.

Don't get me wrong, 'cause any road that I plan to drive on is going to be just as bumpy, as the road I've always been on. Life is all psychological though. It's like a lot of people say something is hard, but I believe it's only as difficult as you make it.

It's a well-known fact that the date of my initiation into the set was 12-7-98. It's a well-known fact that I was dedicated and played my role as a "baby gangsta." Fo' sho', I love to bang, but I love my freedom even more. That doesn't mean that if I'm unfortunate enough to hit the pen and I'm hit up, which is inevitable, that I'm gonna let the next man disrespect me. Better believe, that this man here is gone do what he has to do to get respected. That's just on general principle.

But now getting back to the topic, the Hall has made me a lot smarter. I've dropped some bad habits plus gained some adequate ones, like reading. Last year I was incarcerated three times, and I only remember reading one book throughout that the whole year. (By the way, the book was called Monster). Since February of this year, I've read 29 books, including Monster, which I have read an additional four times. Besides reading, I've been exercising constantly. Struggling to lose this beer belly.

Also, being locked up has made me realize who my true folks is. It's like when you're in a set, the whole team is supposed to be loyal to you, but the truth is, they is only homies by law. I've realized that most of these cats is halfway banging. Way too many got the set in their mouth and not even knowing what it's all about. But yet they think that Baby A don't know. But the truth is, I'm one step ahead of them, 'cause I know that they think that I don't know. Too many done let jealousy corrupt their brains. Misery loves company also.

This is dedicated to all the lost souls incarcerated in this facility and throughout the world. Keep you eyes on your enemies, watch your friends, put your life in your own hand, or your life will end.

-Baby A

Interview With Alex

B: So we haven't seen you in this unit before. How many times have you been to the Hall?

Alex: Couple times, maybe three times.

B: So, right on time for Christmas, eh? Have you spent the holidays in here before?

A: I spent last Christmas in YA and the Christmas before that here.

B: Dang. If you've only been here a few times, what were you doing in YA already? Plus, you look pretty young.

A: I was at the Ranches and I ran away. They sent me to a group home after I ran from the Ranch and I ran away from there and I got charged with a pretty serious crime, but it was really bogus; I didn't do it. For that crime I got sent to YA, and since I was innocent, I applied for an appeal.

B: An appeal? What's that and how does it work?

A: For some people the appeals process really works. When they charged me, I signed up and said I wanted to file an appeal. So I was in YA for a year, waiting for an appeal and doing my time, and then they brought me back to Juvenile Hall, because they said they had reason to believe I really didn't do it.

B: It doesn't seem like many people file appeals.

A: If I do something, I take responsibility, but when I don't do something, I'll fight for it to show I really didn't do it.

B: Did you have to get a lawyer to file an appeal?

A: That's an interesting question. My mom cried to this lawyer about how I was really being treated unfairly, didn't get a good trial, and how they cheated me. So then the lawyer told my mom he'd take the case for free if he investigated and found I didn't do it, but he'd charge her the investigation fee if he found out I did do it.

B: So did you come back from YA right away?

A: No, they took me to Appeals Court, based on two small pieces of evidence — one being a woman who couldn't see more than fifty yards. She could see people, but couldn't give a description. The second thing was the prosecutors said that because kids usually commit crimes on the run and I was on the run, I committed the crime, but the appeals court said those were improper reasons for convicting someone of a crime. So they dismissed my case and I'll get time served and maybe go to a group home.

B: Seeing all you've been through, do you have any advice for Beat readers?

A: Yeah, actually I do. If you believe in something, fight for it, 'cause you might just get lucky. And if you don't, at least you tried.

-Alex

this is the place where the worst of society is sent

Look At Me

Look at me, facial expression with a sinful grin

Look at me, facing 20 plus years inside of a pen

Look at me upon my knees praying to a God who don't answer,
stressing out, receiving gray hairs, ulcers and cancer

Look at me pacing back and fourth inside of my cell,
contemplating on a daily on why we are stranded in hell

Look at me mad as can be 'cause I don't get no mail,
no pictures of females
So there's no way for me to play show and tell

Look at me with a million-dollar bail
to get free, seems like I'll be here for awhile
I don't have that much money

Look at me writing love letters to a female
who don't like me,
she said that she hates me
and wants her brothers to fight me

Look at me feeling stupid 'cause I don't have no game,
been putting in work for awhile
and still haven't gained any fame

Look at me risking my life all for the love of a color
that doesn't mean anything
'cause the dope game done took over

Look at me a young thug
who used to waste all of his money on weed,
another victim of temptation and greed

Look at me in need of a stable family and some friends,
some people who can comprehend on what's going on in my zone

Look at me, the same person who used to cut school
for alcohol and weed aroma
but now I got my GED
and in the process of getting my diploma

Look at me, the one who used to walk the streets
with his pants saggin',
ruining his cuffs
but now when I go to court,
I'm quick to pull my pants up

Look at me, the first one who would hit you up with a gang sign
but since I'm through with that drama,
all I can throw up is the peace sign

Look at me, the one who used to abuse his mother
with the words I let ease up out my mouth,
now when I talk to her I tell her how much I love her
and that I wish I could be out there helping out

Look at me, a young G who used to serve them dope fiends
now, I'm the one who fantasizes about a legal million-dollar dream.
-Baby A

it's a shame how we get judged for our crime instead of the knowledge that we have in our mind

Heavy On The Shoulders

Every day that I wake up inside this juvenile facility,
I think to myself on how I'm living so miserably
facing hard time, yes, I'm oppressed and full of hate,
and to make it even worse, I'm on the same boat with my roommate, night and day we
contemplate
on how this game got compiled
wishing we had magic powers to get out of this green mile,
trying our best to keep our heads up
'cause there's people who got it worse
but at times the pressure is so heavy it feels
like were going to burst
not knowing what's going to happen in court
YA or the state pen
constantly thinking that if we died
would we come back and do it again
sometime I say yes I would
because this lifestyle is titillating
but sunny days turn cloudy
when it seems everybody is infiltrating
hypocrites instigating, licentious and unashamed
talking bad when your back is turned but quick
to smile in your face
I don't see it, but I feel the incubus
in my range got me paranoid
and thinking all types of weird things
I honestly believe that all this weight is wearing me down
crushing my self-esteem
so I walk with my head down
often talking to myself people looking at me all crazy
probably thinking that I'm an overgrown crack baby
but I don't stress too much over other people's thoughts
there's only so much you can think while living
in the land of the lost
and since we all seem to be lost
then naturally we're lost souls
on a mission to oblivion
forced to take a crooked road.

-Baby A

I don't see it, but I feel the incubus in my range got me paranoid

Immoderate Contemplation

I'm in my cell doing pushups and dips
trying to get swoll
working nonstop till I can no longer push no more
then when I'm all done, I post up
and stare at the wall
Steady punishing myself for being here in the Hall
trying my best not to cry and it's not 'cause I care what people think
but with my situation, crying is not going to help a damn thing,
at times I get emotional to the point where I feel soft
that's when I pound on my chest
then tell myself to knock it off
can't let this situation keep me down
got to be a machine in this game,
mentally and physically, that's the only way to maintain
trying hard not to let my anger get me in trouble
visceration and most of these inmates be making
my blood boil and these counselors don't make it no better
they don't even counsel
instead, they talk more trash than a trash can
making our world more dismantled
acting like they better than us
'cause they calling shots
thinking that they can't be touched
I think not,
but all I'm able to do is sit back
and laugh at them egocentric individuals
hoping that I get the maximum,
not the minimal,

thinking that I don't know what they think about us,
think about me
I know what they say about youngstas
who cause chaos in the streets
we're not no good, we dirty,
filthy, like scum, unworthy
disrespectful and evil
inferior to all people
see, it's a shame how we get judged for our crime instead of the
knowledge that we
have in our mind
they looking past us like they blind
But I know y'all see
I see you peeping at me
rolling your eyes and sucking your teeth
Should of been more discreet
Man, I can't wait to get out
So I won't have to put up with this madness
laced with unbearable sadness
for more than 365 days I done been stranded
been to court about 20 times for this silly-ass crime
sometimes I contemplate on if the system
is aware that I'm not able to swim
'cause from my point of view
they trying to wash me
like some dirty laundry
I holler at my comrade who has a few years of experience
his reply was for me to keep my head up and never let up.

-Baby A

the *beat* without

From The Beat: The following BWO pieces are some standout writings that have crossed our desk the last couple of years. For this special "system" issue it is a great honor to rerun these pieces again, especially given that we are a weekly, and the pieces in our issue are constantly changing. So brace yourself for some very insightful writings as we replay some excellent BWOs. Still, this is only a mere taste. Think if we had the funds to create a Beat book!?

Israel Perez

Corcoran State Prison, SHU

Talking To My Self

Beat readers, there is someone that I once knew who passed away, or should I say was murdered so very long ago. I wouldn't seek to gain knowledge or wisdom from this person. In fact, I would seek to offer it. This person I speak of would be myself as a young boy, before my world began to tatter and tear.

I would look deeply into those innocent brown eyes of mine, and tell my young self, "Don't allow dad's fist, feet, and belt to destroy your little-boy spirit. I know sometimes he just beats you for no reason, which causes you to exist in a constant state of paranoia, but it won't last forever like you fear."

I would take those small, unweathered hands of mine, and squeeze them in these scarred claws, and say, "When you are about seven years old, our dad will call you into his room where his girlfriend is lying on the bed. He'll clamp his iron grip around your fragile, skinny neck, and smother your face into his girlfriend's naked crotch. You'll experience a primal fear of suffocation as your lungs scream out for just one precious breath of air. Yet, all you'll receive is dad's drunken, slurred voice saying, 'This what real men like,' and 'My true son wouldn't cry.'"

I would make sure my young self understood that he must not grow up to have a low opinion of females due to one woman who was just as scared of my father's abuse as I was.

I would tell my little self, "When dad shoots your dog because it bit him after he kicked it, Brownie will be in a better place, beyond further abuse. And when dad brings home a pet rabbit for your 8th birthday, don't name her Flip-Flop, and don't get too attached, 'cause you'll be forced to eat her when times get tough."

I would tell my innocent self that when mom comes to pick you up so you can live with her, cherish the next four years because they will be the most normal that you'll ever know. I would say that when you turn twelve years old, rock cocaine will begin to erode your single-parent home. But don't grow up to loathe your mom and older sisters, 'cause they didn't realize the end results of their actions.

I would tell me not to commit that first crime, because it will lead to a vicious cycle of crime and prison; not to make friends with your best friend because he's the type of guy that will get your girlfriend hooked on drugs and pimp her while you're locked away in jail; not lose your virginity to your junior high school sweetheart,

'cause she has low self-esteem, and can be manipulated by guys into self destruction; not to commit that home invasion robbery, 'cause you'll end up torturing a man with boiling water and electricity, and his screams will echo in your ears long after the money is gone, (not to mention the 17-year prison sentence that will carry off all your childhood dreams).

I will tell that child who enters prison not to stab that guy over prison politics; not to stomp on your cell mate so badly that he soils himself; not to come out for breakfast on your first day at a different prison, 'cause seven guys will mistake you for someone else, and you will be punched, kicked, stomped, maced, and hit with a rubber bullet; not to lose your temper and knock out that prison guard, 'cause it will result in another four years added to your sentence; not to cover your body in tattoos, 'cause during the process, the hepatitis virus will get pushed under your skin along with the gangster ink.

However, most importantly, I would tell my self, "Never blame outside elements for poor choices you will make. Dad can't be used as an excuse for your abusive behavior towards others. Environment can't be used as a scapegoat for your criminal activities. Family drug use is not a green light to indulge in drug use yourself."

If my words fail to have their intended effect, then at least I will have the chance to see that innocent boy I once was. I think back, and sometimes I recall that excitement of Christmas morning, running wild on Halloween night, the fluttering in my stomach when a pretty girl showed interest, and so many other forgotten things that hit me when I least expect it.

So, that would be the person I would most like to have a conversation with over dinner because, in the end, nothing else matters but who you allow your self to turn into. Martin Luther King Jr. does not have to wake up in your body every morning. When you look into a mirror, it's not Tupac in the reflection. Your sensitivity towards the poor and diseased ain't Mother Teresa's. In the end, only one person has the biggest influence on who we are, how we think, and our happiness as human beings, and that's our selves.

It may not make much sense to many people out in the free world, but I can't count the times I've heard other convicts say, "I wish I could push the rewind button, or at least be my innocent self for one day."

"You Don't Have A Life"

A white explosion erupted painlessly within my ringing skull. All of a sudden, I knew not where I was, like a waking young child who has forgotten where and when he lay down to sleep. In a thick soupy fog is where I found myself, grasping to make sense of the loud barking words that were beginning to each my deafened ears.

Then, without warning, another explosion sent shock waves through my brain as it was still struggling to process the confusing information it was being sent. However, this explosion served to speed up my brain's thought process, allowing me to quickly realize that my face was being smashed into a closed metal door. Every survival instinct in my being ordered reflexes to bring up my hands in protection, yet those instincts were thwarted by the steel handcuffs that bound my hands behind me.

I then felt my body being violently pulled in a direct I didn't wish to go. My feet stumbled behind, unable to come up to speed as fast as my racing mind. But my racing mind wasn't a blessing, for I began to envy those slow-reacting feet when the realization of what was happening and why finally cleared away the fog.

The morning of September 26, 2003, began like any other morning here at California's Corcoran SHU (Security Housing Unit) program, with the obnoxious call to the feeding trough resonating through the honeycomb of cells. And though I couldn't see the other prisoners in their own personal cubicles, I'm sure the scene would resemble that of farm animals alerting to the sound of the feeding bell. I retrieved my tray of tasteless sustenance, then set it down

at its designated spot before reaching to turn on "Good Morning America." I hoped that today's program would spend less time updating the waking nation about J-Lo and Ben's relationship, and more time on issues that affected the world. (Of course, I was left hungry for more solid news, and over-saturated in senseless banter.)

Finished with the detested breakfast tray that held more slop than my digesting stomach, I heard my name being called loudly by the guard in the control tower. I moved to the front of my cell to see what the cause for this break in my monotonous schedule.

"Perez, Doctor's line!" shouted the guard in the form of a question, his tone dripping with hope that I'd refuse, so no extra work would be necessary. So, a little out of spite, a little out of curiosity, and mostly out of the need for variation, I said yes.

I rushed to slip on my pair of black and white prison manufactured imitation Converse, and slip into my banana yellow jump suit that was tailored to fit a seven-foot, three-hundred-pound man. Covertly, I snatched up the latest book I was reading, "The Years of Rice and Salt" by Kim Robinson, and secretly tucked it into my boxer's waistband. This had to be done in order to combat the occasional long periods prisoners sometimes spend in the clinic's holding cells. Otherwise, you'd find yourself reading the many pointless scribbling along the filthy walls, scribbles that were produced by bored and stagnant trapped minds.

When I learned which building officers would be escorting me to the clinic area to drop me off, a slight tinge of relief settled on the social part of my mind. For they were the only female staff that

continued on next page

Once locked in the holding cell I pulled out my smuggled book

continued from previous page

Israel Perez Corcoran State Prison, SHU

regularly worked in the housing unit, and they always shooed me as much respect as one could hope to expect in a prison setting. But what I favored most about them was they could hold a decent conversation about literature and other relating issues. So when they asked me to turn my back to them and stick my hands out the food slot for handcuffing, I almost didn't resent the cold metal that lamed me.

The football-field-length walk to the clinic was uneventful, with conversation consistent with prior held ones. I always found it very refreshing to converse with someone who didn't interject a crude curse between every other word. And I learned long ago that California's "hardened criminals" didn't corner the market on poor communication skills. So, already content with the nanosecond of normalcy, I couldn't believe my good fortune when discovering I was the first prisoner to arrive for the doctor. There would be no long wait surrounded by revolting corners which have been used as a spittoon for many years, and only God know what else.

The MTA (Medical Technician Assistant) hovered patiently behind the female guards as they secured me inside the holding cell and removed my handcuffs. Instinctively, I rubbed my wrists, even though they didn't hurt, and called to the backs of the retreating officers to remember to leave a cage open for me on the yard. Their flippant, "Yeah, yeah, yeah" did little to assure me that they'd recall my request five seconds after the clinic door closed behind them.

Before I knew it, I was handcuffed again and being whisked into the doctor's office. There, the same worn armless chair was waiting for me to straddle backwards. I leaned my chest against the back of the chair and focused on the spectacles that seemed to defy gravity by barely hanging precariously on the end of the doctor's nose. The doctor, not bothering to look up from my medical file, began telling me that everything was great and not to worry. Now, if such a declaration had come from any other doctor employed by the prison system, I would have had to fight back a snort. But this was a humane physician who seemed to take the Hippocratic oath seriously. (I suspected this was due to the Star of David ring he always wore.)

After enthusiastically thanking the doctor for his time, I was escorted back to the holding tank. Even the clinic officer's tight grip on my bent elbow did little to dampen my jovial mood. Not today. Once locked in the holding cell I pulled out my smuggled book preparing to hunker down and read. Just as I got comfortable (if that were even possible) the sound that usually queued me to hide my book reached my ears. For some reason I failed to heed the warning and seconds later two of my housing unit officers stood staring at the brand-new book in my lap. I rose up to a standing position not even realizing yet that I had been caught doing wrong. That is 'til I was bombarded with questions, "So you snuck a book out hour house, huh? You try'n to front us off? You try'n to make us look bad?" asked a semi-tall Hispanic officer, not allowing me ample time to respond with a flimsy excuse. His counterpart (a stocky, overweight, bald-headed Caucasian male) angrily eyed the item in question, signaling my senses to be wary.

For the third time that morning, cold metal was placed around my wrist. I backed out of the cell into the waiting hands of clearly agitated officers, and felt a bit more force than usual to guide me back "home". Halfway through the walk back to my repetitive program, the Caucasian officer forcefully ripped the offending book from my hand. The rude gesture raised a quick protest to my lips, yet when I seen the officer's face, that protest was quelled. It was easily apparent that the look on his round fleshy face begged for a verbal confrontation. Having no taste for senseless unwinnable battle, I respectfully requested the book be returned upon reaching my cell. Yet, that hope was thoroughly dashed when the officer responded with, "You wanna cry over books?"

Entering the housing unit, it suddenly dawned that an important piece of paper was marking my place in the now-confiscated book. So, as I stood waiting for a heavy metal door to electronically slide open for me, I decided to ask for it. But even before finishing my question, I was cut short by an order to "face the fuckin' door!" Realizing that the officer didn't understand I just wanted the paper, I felt compelled to make myself clear before being locked powerless inside my cell. So I slightly turned my head to the right in order to see the officer as I spoke. "Let me just get that paper inside the..."

The dissipated fog revealed what the officer wished to do with me.

It wasn't difficult to guess when I noticed how dangerously fast the cinder block wall was coming towards me. And only in the last moment did I manage to avert my face in time to avoid the solid impact my chin absorbed. The impact caused a spectacular light show to explode behind my closed eyes, nearly erasing the progress my brain had made after only moments ago being bashed twice on the metal door. Then loud barking assaulted my already ringing eardrums once more. Yet, unlike the first time, I was able to make out what was being shouted.

"You don't have a life," angrily yelled the Caucasian officer. "I have the life, you muthafucker" screamed his quivering wet lips, spraying my face with foamy spittle.

Then another explosion erupted unmercifully, sending the impact's echo bouncing around my throbbing head. "Do you hear me, punk? You don't have a life" raged the obese officer filling the air with the smell of his digesting breakfast. I kept expecting the other two officers who were present to intervene, but when the next devastating blow was delivered, those expectations faded. So I resigned myself to the inevitable blow that I knew was coming. But seemingly of its own accord, my body remembered an old juvenile hall trick. It went completely limp in the officer's iron grip. Then my every muscle convulsed violently as if I were having a seizure.

The ploy had its intended effect, for it scared one of the watching officers into activating the panic button. I heard the distinct buzzing alarm going off outside, as well as the disappointment in my attacker's voice. He knew as I did that the alarm would bring many running people to our location. People like his supervisor, medical personnel, and other interest eyes.

Now if I were an intelligent individual, I would have played the role 'til those running people came charging into the building. But, being that I'm bi-racially mixed with fool, I permitted a giggle to escape my bloody lip. That small giggle brought the head of the 3rd knee in the world down squarely upon my back. It took a moment to realize that the wind had been knocked out of me in a way it would probably never return. My heavily wheezing lungs blocked out the steady stream of foul words and spittle that showered down on the back of my bald head. And when I at last recovered enough to care about the world outside my pain, I noticed many more tightly laced black boots planted around my head.

Never would I have imagined that the presence of more authoritative figures would be a welcomed sight, but their presence meant my handcuffed beating would come to a much needed halt. Their presence meant my raw panic to escape the snare that exposed me to sadistic blows could finally ebb. And most importantly, their presence meant the more witnesses to human rights violations, the harder to cover it up. So, with an exhausted sigh, I allowed the tension in my bruised muscles to finally relax.

"He bit me, Sergeant! The bastard bit me right here!" said a heavily breathing voice, to the owner of the boots directly in front of me. The tension and panic immediately returned to my body on the heels of rushing adrenaline. I opened my mouth to voice an objection to the accusations being made over my prone body. However, I never got a chance. Many hands yanked me to my feet violently, as a pair choked me into unconsciousness. The last thing I remembered before waking up in my cell were the American flags that half the officers wore pinned on their uniforms.

Kneading the swollen, lopsided head that appeared before me in the mirror, old familiar demons banged insistently on the long bolted door. Their barging nearly knocked the door from the hinges that held it secure, as a seething from the deepest depths of my being threatened to consume the small island of humanity that kept my flesh mortal. I paced my cell feeling hatred tear into my entrails like a cornered beast suffering fatal wounds. I paced my cell loathing every living creature on the planet, longing to strike them all down with a smile. I paced and paced for a million aching years, each step bring me closer to the ledge many prisoners have leapt before. I paced and paced 'til the words that should have sent me over that ledge began to echo in my sore ears:

"You don't have a life!" And my jaw clenches tightly.

"You don't have a life!" And my breathing grows shallow.

"You don't have a life!" And my demons stop banging.

"You don't have a life!" And my will to struggle on emerges from the fire forged into hardened, molten steel.

"You don't have a life!" And my will to be free from the world of prison becomes cemented in a way it never has before.

Israel Perez Corcoran State Prison, SHU

How did I end up in such a situation?

The Visit

For most of the citizens in our "get-tough-on-criminals" society, the word "prison" conjures up many terrifying images and frightening scenarios. Their fearful minds automatically begin to envision crudely manufactured weapons, senseless race riots, brutally sadistic guards, and the infamous nightmare that most in society nervously laugh at, "prison rape." They begin to recall every prison film they've ever watched, every muscular, tattooed, deep-voiced character that was violently portrayed.

But that is about as far as their knowledge on prisons, and the human beings who are forced to exist in them, go. They don't grasp the full reality of what their local anchor person is saying when they report (and in most cases don't report) on someone receiving a prison sentence of ten, fifteen, twenty-five years to life. They don't grasp that there are seconds in those ten years, minutes in those fifteen, hours in those twenty-five, and actual human beings in those life sentences.

The average citizen can't comprehend that it's not the physical wounds that make a prison such a hellish nightmare, but rather the internal turmoil that wreaks havoc upon the prisoner's emotional state, coupled with the inability to speak openly about it.

So, for those in society who only envision scenes from films such as "American Me" when hearing the word "prison" uttered, I would like to paint another scene for you. And I can only hope that what I paint has the same lasting impact as all those stereotypical prison films have had.

Throaty snores rhythmically drifted down from the bunk above my own metal slab. The loud snores made it impossible for me to latch onto a passing dream, no matter how many times I tossed and turned searching for that true position. Instead I lay tangled in my suffocating sheets, like a snared forest creature who has grown tired from fruitless attempts at escape. My fitful bout with sleep left me thoroughly frustrated, with only silent curses for my cellmate's insensitive and selfish snores.

Yet, I knew full well his breathing had very little, if not nothing to do with my temporary insomnia. The true culprit behind my restlessness was my own queasy stomach. It waited in worried anticipation for the newborn sun to arrive. A newborn sun that would bring with it a moment I had all but given up on seeing, my first visit since being shipped off to prison over four long years ago. Years in which I was denied the pleasure of drinking in the features of familiar faces I knew from the free world. Years in which I began to believe my pre-prison memories were fragments of someone else's life.

So, the anticipation of receiving a visit from an old childhood friend and his wife caused my stomach to feel as if it belonged to a child on Christmas Eve. The visit would confirm to my unsure mind that I did once live beyond the prison's dull gray walls. The memories I spoke of to my fellow captives did actually take place.

Resigned to the fact that peaceful slumber was proving much too elusive, I sat up and searched the darkness for my wristwatch. I found it atop my thirteen inch TV, then activated the button which illuminated the timepiece's face. the indigo light glowed back an early five-thirty a.m. as I slid my sock-covered feet along the cold concrete floor 'til I made contact with my house slippers.

With much care not to disturb my sleeping cellmate, I stood up and reached for my lighter and pack of English 555 cigarettes. I crept the couple short steps to the silhouetted toilet. It was fixed in the corner only inches from the cell's door, and did very little in the area of privacy. But, like most prison cells across America, the toilet conveniently doubled as a chair, and did so at that moment as well.

The shock of cold stainless steel against the back of my nearly bare legs guaranteed I would not be crawling back into bed.

Sometimes I was convinced that the cold toilets were some form of psychological torture, but once the surface was warmed by my own body heat, the conspiracy would vanish.

I rubbed a blue flame out of my lighter, then touched it to the tip of my imported cigarette. Smoothly, I exhaled a plume of seductive deadly smoke. I watched as it floated on an invisible current of air that constantly seeped out the sides of the cell door. The lack of oxygen to my brain, along with the cigarette's orange-red ember, caused a hypnotic haze to engulf me.

Soon, I found myself pondering old familiar questions. How did I end up in such a situation? What happened to all my schoolmates and friends? Did my true love truly love me? Does my family, and if so, why don't they ever visit or write? Who led me to such complete and utter ruin? Of course, I already knew the answer to that question, yet that minor detail never prevented me from searching the ashes of my past for a scapegoat to lay blame on.

Before I could stop myself, I was lost inside my head. Through dusty memories, I rummaged, memories I held dear, like old irreplaceable family photos. And I could have easily remained lost indefinitely in that timeless world if it weren't for my cellmate's voice penetrating my reverie. I cocked an ear to catch a bit of his rambling, once I realized he was talking in his sleep. A silent chuckle shook me as I listened to him challenge some imaginary adversary to a fight. It seemed even in sleep he couldn't find peace.

However, the humorous thought quickly evaporated. My cellmate's precarious situation had a sobering effect on my cigarette-hazed mind, for he had no outside friends, no family, and no financial resources. And, like most prisoners in the same predicament, he suffered from a sense of worthlessness, as if he had nothing to contribute to the group of prisoners he associated with. Even worse, he had to depend on me and others to provide him with canteen food, soap, and all other items that weren't provided by the state. This resulted in him (and others in the same situation) feeling a need to volunteer for any violent dirty work that needed taking care of.

With the hissing sound of my cigarette making contact with the toilet water, I got up to wash my face in the sink. Vigorously, I tried to scrub away the ugly nightmare my cellmate existed in, for though we lived in the same cell, we were sentenced to two entirely different prisons. He had a life term, while I had a release date. He had never known freedom as an adult, while I had been sentenced at the age of twenty-two. He had never lost his virginity, while I had known pleasures of the flesh, and even known love. We were in two drastically different prisons, with mine being the far better or the two.

In an attempt to clear my thoughts, I turned on the cell's dim light. Once convinced that the light wouldn't bother my cellmate's sleep, I pulled the clothes I would be wearing to my visit off the clothing line. Carefully, I handled the brand-new prison clothes as if the blue jeans and blue dress shirt were a fine Hugo Boss suit. I fingered the sharp creases I had paid another inmate to work into the material, then almost absentmindedly began to slowly dress. Once completely dressed, with my hair thick with pomade, I found myself doing a balancing act on the toilet. I struggled to examine my appearance in the small mirror that was firmly cemented to the wall. Its size was hardly ideal for the task, but nevertheless satisfied my desire to view what my visitors would be seeing.

Suddenly, the building's announcement speakers came to life nearly causing me to lose my footing. A guard's voice announced that it would be fifteen minutes till the cell doors popped open for breakfast.

Confused, I looked to the back of the cell where a sliver of window was located. Shocked to see that morning had crept upon me unnoticed, I stepped off the toilet as my cellmate sat up rubbing

Unable to resist the door's window — it attracted me like a porch light attracts a moth

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Israel Perez
Corcoran State Prison, SHU

sleep from his eyes. Like every morning, he immediately claimed to have had a 'crazy ass dream,' then slid off the top bunk to wash up. I informed him that I wouldn't be accompanying him and the "homies" to chow hall that morning. On any other morning, such a claim would have been strangely out of the ordinary, for prisoners (myself included) rarely varied from their set routines. But without the need to communicate it, my cellmate understood that it was no ordinary day for me.

Two hours after all the inmates had been released for the morning meal in true cattle fashion, I sat in front of the TV exactly where my cellmate had left me. And if anyone had asked what I'd been watching during those two hours, I would have been incapable of answering. The mental paralysis frightened me, so much so that I turned off the TV in hopes that a little silence would help me put my thoughts in order.

Instead, the opposite was true. The silence only served to amplify the chaos within my head. So, almost in panic, I pushed the play button on my cassette player. Instantly, I began to relax as an angelic female voice drowned out my thoughts. Her romantically tragic ballad filled my dreary cell with beautiful Vietnamese, then French. Just hearing the French caused me to crave a strong cup of coffee and cigarette.

With reckless speed, I leapt to the cassette player and repeatedly jammed a finger at it till I hit the stop button. So violent was my action that the player toppled over and nearly fell from the metal locker it rested on.

"Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!" I cursed myself as I rushed to the cell door in two big fluid strides. Rapidly, my eyes searched out the guard's figure in the control tower. I peered through the tower's windows and found him readjusting the vinyl strap on his M14 rifle. By his body language I tried to gather whether or not he'd called my name and cell for a visit while I'd been stupidly listening to music. Nervous, my feet refused to obey my commands to move away from the door's window. Only after I was quite sure the guard's eyes glanced over my presence in the window several times did I reluctantly step away.

Harshly, I chastised myself for falling victim to such anxiety, while I righted the upset cassette player. I checked my wristwatch for the time. Its hands read shortly after nine-thirty a.m., which translated in my mind to "I could get called for the visit at any moment."

Unable to resist the door's window — it attracted me like a porch light attracts a moth — every gesture, shift and move the guard in the tower made was tracked by my watchful eyes. Each time he picked up the phone, my heart rate raced with anticipation, yet when he failed to make an announcement, or even worse, called another inmate's name for a visit, my hopes would come crashing down. And a small bit of anger would spark at the back of my mind with each disappointing crash.

Astonished to discover just how much time had elapsed while stationed at the window, a tinge of panic set in. I couldn't believe how quickly the minute hand was ticking by, for time was always something that dragged along at a torturous pace for me. Time had always dragged while sitting on hard benches in cold county jail holding tanks waiting for court appearances. Time had always dragged while waiting each day for a loved one's letter to reach my eager hands. And time definitely always dragged while waiting to bury another day of my sentence. So, the way in which my wristwatch's hands were behaving made me feel as if I'd entered another dimension. It felt as if I were attempting to hold back the

ocean's rising tide.

The seemingly benign bit of anger I had been experiencing all day exploded without warning. I began to suspect that my visitors were intentionally arriving late, that they knew exactly what they were doing by cruelly driving slow. They laughingly joked as they ate up more and more valuable time.

In a blind rage, I pulled the three photo ducats (pink cards of paper that were purchased via canteen to take Poloroid pictures during visits) from my shirt pocket and frenziedly ripped them to confetti. Visiting hours were more than halfway finished, and I knew that all the coveted film was already exhausted by prisoners lucky enough to receive early visits.

With that thought, my mental dialogue turned verbal. I began to rant and rave while pacing over the shredded photo ducats. Every foul word in my vocabulary burst forth to be hurled at my friends. I cursed them with vulgar Filipino words, with Vietnamese, and with English. I accused them of dark treachery and being active participants in every conspiracy plot against me. I easily managed to link them to every hardship I'd suffered since entering the prison system, and I told them in raw terms how I felt about it.

At the very peak of my foul-mouthed rantings, an image flashed across my mind's eye. I pictured my friends on the side of Highway 101, their bodies battered and broken from the roll-over crash that had thrown them from their vehicle. Glass, metal, plastic, even the shoes they had been wearing were scattered about the highway, the impact was so violent. They had lost their lives in an attempt to visit me, I imagined. They had taken precious time out of their busy schedules, only to be rewarded with an early death and ungrateful curses from me. All the anger went out of me.

Guiltily I swept the pink confetti from the floor. When the cell was restored to pre-explosion conditions, I removed my "fine Hugo Boss suit," calmly sat down and turned on the TV. I put back on the prison mask that fit me so well, and repeatedly whispered, "If they come, they come. If they don't, they don't."

The unmistakable sound of many men entering the cell block reached my ears. In seconds my cellmate stood in front of the cell. The look on his face told me he could tell my visit never came. We just exchanged that stupid smile that all prisoners use when there's emotions involved. The cell door popped open and I made a dash towards one of the collect-call-only phones that was bolted to a wall. Frantically, I punched in my friend's home number trying to beat the five minutes till cell lock-up. Nervously, I ran my fingers through my greasy hair and prayed someone would quickly pick up on the other side.

With the day I had had I was shocked to hear my friend's voice claiming he was hoping I'd call. He went on to tell me that he and his wife overslept, then decided not to make the trip. The whole time he was explaining, he tried to laugh it off, but I could hear the guilt he was suffering.

"Next week then?" I asked, but was met with his silence. He informed me that they had out of town business to tend to, but would make the trip soon. It took all of me to hide the hurt I was feeling about their oversleeping, while I'd yet to close my eyes since the night before.

"Next time then," I said. "Next time," he repeated back to me.

I sat on the cold toilet and asked my cellmate what happened on the yard today. He began giving me a rundown on the day's events, and I pretended to listen. I rubbed a blue flame out of my lighter, then touched it to the tip of my cigarette. The haze entered my thoughts and I thought to myself, next time.

I was shocked to hear my friend's voice claiming he was hoping I'd call

the *blow* without

William Grajeda Pelican Bay State Prison/SHU

**I feel uncomfortable when
they tell me I must be
strip-searched.**

My First Fifteen Days

"How did I get here?" "What is this place?" "I want to go back home, back to the streets."

First time in Juvie I was nine, ten years old. First time looking at the concrete walls. My first time remembering a long silence that occurred in my life. The first time remembering being scared by myself, alone in a strange place. But I was from the streets, the varrio, the ghetto and somewhere inside, I found a timid defiance that was ten feet high, a timid defiance that would be timid no longer with each passing day being left farther behind.

While my young fears suckled at the defiant natures of a growing seditious pride, as I began to stare back at the menacing concrete blocks of Juvenile Hall... All the counselors and staff seemed so big, now my courage hasn't yet reached that high especially when they grab my arm with their huge hands, strangers I don't know, I feel uncomfortable when they tell me I must be strip-searched. "Who are these perverts staring at me naked?" I am ten years old, first time in Juvie Hall. Every day I think mom or someone is going to save me from it all, she always eases my obfuscate fears, that is when she is not in prison or nodding away.

Strange meats, funny looking noodles, hot soups and raisin oatmeal they serve me. I have never seen half the food that I'm eating but hey, I don't really care. My vagrant hunger is full, the only thing that never made sense to me is when they mix the peanut butter with jelly in one container and put it on the bread. For some reason I always thought that was dumb, generic if I don't say, in fact if I didn't always feel hungry every minute of the day, then that's one thing I wouldn't eat, but can I really complain? I never ate so many meals before in just one day.

From intake — which I thought was always the most dreadful part, to my first unit which for some reason seemed like a walk in the playground to me when compared to the long dark silence of intakes monotonous isolation. My earliest Juvenile times had begun, so many fences, barbed wire gates, so many "face the wall son," and "get in lines," "tuck in that shirt." I can't think straight. I don't like their tone perhaps it reminds me of pops quick hand, that's why I'm real quick to catch one instead of a hand they threaten you with rec. time in your room... Let's see how long that lasts!

So many different kids, different faces around, strange names from distant places but I notice in most of their eyes there is something of myself I see and when they talk; well were already like long lost friends... Of course if your bewildered eyes don't reflect the hard youth of varrio, ghetto, desolate street years, then even amongst a bunch of ten year olds, you'll be an outcast in here. It's peculiar how a barrio, ghetto ten-year-old kid can easily recognize his own kind and immediately sense the weakness of these eccentric suburban kids who ran away from home to get their parents attention, while we got caught stealing our dinner for tomorrow's hunger pangs.

Every morning we have a hot breakfast with extras, sometimes. Every afternoon we have recreational activities. I think it was the first time I played so many different games, for a moment I happily drifted away, that is until I was locked back in to my cage. I always became restless and anxious, it seemed when I was put back in there, those long seemingly endless hours of monotony haunted me surely. I desperately longed to wonder the streets of my freedom only if I could take all those hot meals with me and a little bit of attention then I wouldn't have a care, with the exception of mom and pops that is, always quarreling over who cops first, who hits first, who's first, who's first.

There's always the kid who looks tough, while I'm the kid who never seems to be okay with being tough enough, so in my constant unrest, I see my way into a skirmish at the slightest Juvie test.

I'm ten years old, nine just past. This is my first fifteen days in Juvenile Hall, which seemed like an eternity in one day behind that concrete wall, but my fifteen days are up now. Mom has finally come to put in her claim. I never felt more free in my youth as I drove away from my first long stay in Juvie Hall, but yet looking back I could not but help feel as those eyes of the ten-year-old boy departing from his Juvenile stay, felt a sense of pride. He made it though Juvie Hall, felt a sense of longing for those hot meals. Surely he was now ecstatically rejoicing being free, yet I think that

ten year old kid sensed it was just the beginning — sensed he had not yet seen the last of Juvenile Hall.

Two months and A Day

A scuffle, a melee, Sirens bellowing, "stop the car, get on the ground," sirens blaring from the cop car that's chasing me...

I'm 12 years old, jammin' some old fine tunes in my first borrowed ride, The Delphonics, "Didn't I Blow Your Mind This Time," or Billy Stewart's, "Strange Feelings," windows rolled down, looking real tough with my creased threads and a seditious look that would probably even intimidate me. I was just swinging by some pad to pick up a homeboy so we could start another night of good times when some local cop just happen to recognize me, not to mention I have been on the run for about nine months for a melee that occurred at school no doubt stirred by my need for provoking controversy in my adolescent rebellion. Growing up in the barrio/ghetto one just knew from the age you began to play around as a kid that you don't talk to or listen to a cop, and if they don't got you then run, something I have seen plenty of times done before in and out of my ghetto life. Well at 12 years old I wasn't exactly a professional getaway driver so it should come as no surprise that I made it through a couple blocks and had to ditch the ride for some Nike training. I didn't get too far either.

There I am handcuffed in the back of the cop car again making another trip up the hill another trip back to Juvenile Hall. Since that first time at ten I made a couple brief returns, but nothing longer than a week. However this time I had a feeling it would be a little longer more than those long ago "fifteen days." I find it kinda eerie how at ten years old looking back through the car window thinking I'll never go back to that hell again yet feeling still a sort of incompleteness, a missing part as if my journey inside the juvy wall had not guide reached its end. Probably because I just had done some time and I suddenly thought since I made it through Juvenile Hall, I just won't get caught next time, as if somehow by spending a few weeks in Juvenile Hall revealed to me all the secrets of getting away, or doing mischief invincibly... Ever feel that way? Anyhow...

Intake

Here I am stripping down naked again in front of the intake controls. I'm not so bashful as before, after the first time you seem to adjust. Still I think they're perverts looking at me naked some times too long, I think. It seems even more disturbing at this age especially when you over heard lewd cracks by the cops being made. "Three minutes in the shower," they say, "one minute to get wet, one minute to soap up, and one minute to rinse." No objections allowed and you're being rushed along with six or seven other new Juvy arrivals. All sharing the same deodorant and toothpaste tube, something that doesn't bother me yet! I feel like I know everything that's around. I'm no longer that scared little kid who was shaking the first time. I know this place like a little town you're visited a couple times and every time on coming back you see everything is the same and you recognize the same familiar faces working in the local bakery or family food store.

"Stand by the doors. Face forward on quiet," is the command a command yelled so persistently you can't but help to think he must've got bullied as a kid, so now he's bullying a bunch of juveniles that remind him everyday of his trouble youth... that remind him of his infantile shame of being bullied, of never learning how to defend himself, or they have an ego trip that strokes their sense of dominating power... There I sit, again I'm sitting staring blankly at the concrete wall, the concrete blocks of Juvenile Hall, there I'm again gazing into the dark silence lost in the deafness of it all.

Restless thoughts running through my head, pops still in the Pen, moms strung out again, that candy bar was good, I wish I had a joint right now, who's going to get me out, I hate this place, I didn't do nothing wrong, how long do I have to stay in here. I fidget, I toss, I turn. Wild thoughts continue to go through my head, I never had kisses like from that first girlfriend before. Her kisses fascinated me, the way we held hands, the way we touched. Still there's nothing compared to the beauty of those eyes and wonder of those first real kisses. I wish she was here. Man, what's Jose and Ruben doing? Probably getting loaded, eating fast food, talking about "damn homeboy got busted again. He'll call don't trip." I

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hey I'm just a 12 years old kid going to be 13 any time now. What do I know right?

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want to love so bad, this emptiness of being unloved is truly my deepest despair. I throw a couple punches in the shadows of the wall and do a couple push ups. I don't care, this place ain't nothing, I ain't tripping. So much time seems to go by, an hour feels like two days. The deafening silence seems to drown me in its unfettered madness. And so my wild thoughts continue thus throughout my stay in intake.

The Boys' Side

Intake always seemed to last so long. It always seemed like you stared sitting in silence forever, whether if it was two days or two weeks waiting to get to your unit. My first stay was on the girls' side were all the young ghetto kids usually go before their teens. But this time I'm old enough to make it to the boys' side. I wonder if it's my familiar face that decides that, or my tough street kid attitude, because they have units on the girl side for my age, but I'm designated for the big boy side they say because I look like a troublemaker and oh a staff remembered I was previously involved in some vagrant melee two years ago. Now the boys' side, that's let me tell you, the boys' side, well once you've been on the girls' side or little boys' side, as it's two-fold known, then you start hearing whispers from staff and other fellow juvies that, oh we got it made over here and that all the real tough kids are on that big boys' side. The tall tales would be so long that afterwards you had an earful of so many dark things about how tough the boys' side was that you started thinking it was really scary over there. I mean you already knew you'd probably have to face some big kid or dangerous peril and this effect was maximized anytime you got out of line in your unit. The staff would immediately shout, threatening, "I'll send you to the boys' side if you keep getting out of line. Or, if you keep coming back to this place again well put you on the big boys' side and let them get you." And so the tall tales goes on inside the young juvenile kids mind. By the time the tall tales have ran their course or should I say after the staff's attempt to intimidate the kids behavioral developments with psychological threats, have embedded their cruel impressions upon their young minds, either the kid straightens up or in my case, the stark image of the boys' side seemed like a wild jungle of untamed animals preying on the weakness to gain strengths. And I, a neglected, unruly kid had this primitive nature growing inside me that was perhaps the offspring of many abuses and suppressed afflictions/resentments, that I could not defend/lash out, back at or against the unremitting depravities or the cruel leather belt wielder that had left its scars.

What Do I Know Right?

Thus in my helpless state of mind I began to emulate the very darkness of the primordial depravity I was experiencing, perhaps unconsciously believing in my emulation I could somehow achieve a greater strength of brutality that would in turn miraculously believing in my emulation I could somehow achieve a greater strength of brutality that would in turn miraculously suddenly overpower any existing or future threats or traumatizations, mentally referring. Hence, I was certainly frightened by the intimidating talks of the boy's side, but yet there was also a frightening excitement of dangerous curiosity provoked by these menacing tales, a curiosity that gave way to extravagant fantasies in my desolate youth, in my one neglected, melancholic state of mind. Fantasies of beating the toughest kids. Fantasies of facing the big boys' side like pops or some other relative would do and be feared. Fantasies though tinged with fears manifested into a fearless challenge of my very own fears. Believing somehow by being able to conquer my imagined threats/enemies/potential aggressors I would not only achieve security but somehow winning a sense of love and thus being loved in turn.

But hey I'm just a 12 years old kid going to be 13 any time now. What do I know right? All I know is my name just got called and I'm watching every one go to the girls' side while me and two other tough looking kids like myself are going to the big boys side.

As I was learning the undaunted silence of dark intake and I might add not with the slightest reluctance, the big boys' side at that moment seemed for more promising to my wild imaginations despite the mounting fears growing anxious in the shadows of long told tales, in contrast to the prolonged monotony of staring into a impenetrable darkness of unrestraining silence. I caught what was to be my last glance of the girls' side corridor leading to the what

William Grajeda Pelican Bay State Prison/SHU

was later to be referred to as the little girly side, or the rich part of town, because of its cleanness and well tended facade not to mention the extra food calls. In comparison to the big boys' side or as better termed, the real juvenile side. The ghetto side where the street kids are trapped in constant unrest, where there are no extra trays and superfluous tales have no room to intimidate the vagrant mind.

I must admit, though I was anxious to leave intake and venture into the jungle of wildness, I felt some what indifferent seeing the more familiar and explored side of my first early times spent in Juvenile Hall dissipating from sight. I felt the secure attachment that comes with time spent in one place begin to rapidly slip away into the consuming chaos of the approaching unknowns and the foreboding shadows of my imagination. I was reluctantly saying goodbye, but I didn't know it at the time. I stared rebellious in timid, in defiance, in challenge for, but a glance and the corridor to my earliest juvenile times was shut and the blink of doleful reflection was masked by the staring anticipation of expected melees masked by all the staring menace a 12 years old street kid from the ghetto life could summon up in his imagination that would surely intimidate any preying-like beast or shall I say any prowling threats on the challenging prowl.

As I walked into the dim labyrinthine hallway that seemed like a maze with many iron locked doors leading to some unknown office or mysterious place perhaps an old dungeon... as many speculate. I felt the chill of a rank breeze upon my weary yet determined cheek and a stiff shiver that caught me off guard as I took in for the first time the stale seemingly airless atmosphere. Were it not for the slight chill then an eerie coldness would be all that remained, a smothering coldness like that of first opening a freezer and its rush of icy smog breathes into the passageways of your senses.

With only an unnoticed brief pause did my second step reveal perhaps a slight hesitation in my stride, maybe it was because I noticed the two other tough kids abruptly halted by a shiver perhaps and being remanded for their startled reaction, or perhaps it was my intense focus on being tough at that moment that my internal charade allowed no room for external deviations without imperative cause. Either way I continued to walk further into the penetrating breeze of a cold dimness towards that concealed designation that occupied the inner depths of my mind, towards that realm which would forever hold me captive in its wild claw, towards the shadow of the beast that awaited to dine on its next generation of prime flesh.

After many doors and countless stops I finally reached the barren, dirty, rundown, corridor that lead to my new home; chipped paint falling off the walls, shoe marks stained on the ground, an empty wrapper or piece of gum stuck on the floor, and not a few reaches scurrying from one corner to the next probably picking up a crumb or chasing a strange ant- something to me that's not new. Perhaps what a Rockwell image of the real barrio projects would be depicted as, only without some loud voice overgrown staff yelling like they're mad, "Face against the wall, on quiet, don't move, stop looking around keep your head straight," with a hard nudge to your back or a sharp poke on the arm to get the message across. I can't stand it when they yell in my ear especially when sometimes so close enough their foul breath or gross spittle reaches near.

I've Arrived

Just a few strides more through the neglected hallway and I finally reach the place were all the tall tales began, where all the tall tales were staring at me lurid and ominous, which seemed now before my eyes a poor remnant of a ghetto scene. Every face I seen appeared to gaze with the same poverty ridden, broken home, neglected youth, imprisoned parents, grinding or addicted eyes. Eyes manifold desperately longing for what they never had, desperately staring that loveless stare; staring steadfast in their stark rebellious vagrancies with the exception of those few who happen to be from the Beverly Hills side of town, who sat at a corner table frightfully, probably praying to someone be promises never to run away from home again, just to get his parents attention or steal something he never needs while he has a pocketful of allowance money.

I notice a couple faces or so perhaps that are tougher then the rest and I see they all glance at me with the preying cunning of a wolf's glare, that is until they see the like image of depravity staring back into their gaze; a gaze that if lasting any longer than

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William Grajeda Pelican Bay State Prison/SHU

**The first couple days are
always preceded by the usual
chaos of first coming in.**

the period of recognition would provoke an unrelenting primal reaction of volatile feeling that could only be tempered by the inevitable challenge of the juvenile melee. I see Brown stares from my side of the barrio, who look just like me, who have the same familiar eyes of generation of poverty, distress and depravity.

I see Black stares from the brothers' projects that appear deceptively different then me that is until you see, you look into their eyes and see your very own reflection of depravity, abuse and neglect. That is, until you see in them another fellow soul born in a life of poverty. That is until you realize we all live in the same ghettos of desolate streets.

Occasionally I see a White stare who has empty eyes like all of us or an Asian glance of straying aloof, but it's transparent that every one here is Black or Brown, every project, barrio, or ghetto just happens to be full of us, every economic default seems to happen in our community, every educational funding seems to go to another school district in a suburban area, and all relatives seem to be either divorced, in prison, in a drug rehab, or somewhere mournfully else. But hey I'm just 12 years old going to be 13 soon and I finally made it to this place that intrigued, that frightened my untamed, timid darkly curious feral imagination.

The first couple days are always preceded by the usual chaos of first coming in. The staff that don't know you always seems to be yelling your name out every minute and you get this eerie feeling that how the whole unit is staring at you reproachfully, reprimanding, when they're just really hoping they don't hear their name bellowed out next and end up doing something clumsy anyhow trying to be extra careful not to be noticed. Showers, bathroom calls and laundry all seem to be done in a rush and you always feel like you're just not moving fast enough, then you are and you end up dropping something suddenly. It all seems to be outside your sense of time, then you always got to keep your eye on the next tough kid just to be sure he doesn't think he's too big, just to be sure he keeps his mischiefs in another direction. All the while you want to ask so many questions all at once, but when you go to ask the counselors it never seems to be the right time so I'm left to depend on a familiar face to run me down in the basics and play the rest by eye and ear. Meanwhile, my natural curiosity takes the features of the place in, the painted walls with all time murals fading on it, the expired rules and old administrative memorandums hanging loosely, torn on the ancient bulletin board. The outside area with an old basketball hoop, the wooden tables, the phone on the wall that everytime you see it, you think about how to sneak an extra phone call.

All this in a blink of eye, in one long yet short process of evaluating thoughts. Then your wandering curiosity oblivious for a moment is drawn to a tough kid who has been staring at you for too long, and suddenly your whole psychic focus has transported itself into the wild depths of an inexorable darkness. "What are you staring at vato?" My irascible tension on the very threshold of challenge poised to react as I wait to hear the reply. He turns his head in attempt to avoid the counter threat as if he didn't I was talking to him or perhaps satisfied I passed some unconscious test of his and he wishes no conflict. Again I repeat, "what are you staring at homes?" I press more confidently perhaps resulting from a perceived sign of weakness I somehow felt, or perhaps my tension had not been quite satisfied with his apparent concession and needed to be tamed a little more, or the wild natures that were growing inside my soul sensed a savage impulse that wanted to devour the weakness of my challenger's cunning threat, that suddenly sensed a wild nature opted for a gesture of peace. Again he fakes as if I'm not there, until I go up to him, myself now the prey turned hunter in brutal, cruel confidence pursuing, "Were you looking at me vato or what?" In front of his face now. He replies, "No I wasn't looking at you homes," with as much courage to save face without seeming weak. He doesn't look so tough to me now. "Well if I catch you looking at me next time then it's on!!" I'm poised for any disconcerting reply. He says every thing is cool, so okay, I say everything is cool. My wild impulse has withdrawn from tension's dark brink; my unruly youth of madness has been briefly tempered.

Someone always told me when I was young, if someone in there looks at you too long just take off and if he's too big there's always a little help lying around that will always help get the job done.

So, within the first couple of days I felt the wild embers begin to stir in my dark nature. I felt my first timid encounter in this new part of the jungle I was in, I felt my first timidity being conquered by a growing ambivalence of an unruly darkness not yet quite understood in a young boy's mind.

In My Room

Monotonous gray hours passed in my graffiti carved, spit stained, stale ventless room that I shared with some strange kid this time. On the girls' side it was always single rooms, on the boys' side it was all double cells. Something that was new to me in experience, so I sat across from my strange roommate from some forgotten place and we exchanged many tales from the gutters of are ghetto lives. Telling them with all the pride of exaggeration and mischief that fuels the flames of our gamin' aspirations and dreams, that appear to make us bigger than what we seem and feeling a sense of camaraderie in our shared identities. After our tall tales, poor jokes, game of tic-tack-toe and those moments of testing one's exaggerated strengths, we probably share a snack or two smug had from our lunch tray or compare pencil stubs we swiped for letter writing or scribbles in our cage, before drifting back off into our intrinsic darkness of silent reverie, slipping back into the lonely depths of our depthless abyss as we are consumed by the tormenting afflictions that really haunt our dreary souls.

Three, Four, Five weeks

Three, four, five weeks have externally passed; three, four, five weeks my face is a familiar one; three, four, five weeks - when am I going to get out of here?! I watch every weekend ghetto kids getting visits from their loved ones. I feel a sharp pain of emptiness knowing I'll never get one. Every phone call I make is to the same phone number over again, every phone call that's answered I hear the repetitious despair in a relative's voice your, " Pops should be out sometime soon, your mom is in the fast lane to cop, there's no time to stop." So the phone call is always the same. Though I did get a visit once from my old grandpa, I never felt so happy before, nor so sad. I reproach myself countless times. This isn't fair. I didn't do nothing wrong. It wasn't my fault. What did I do, besides provoking a school melee and a futile attempt at a high-speed chase at 12. I thought I could do whatever I wanted... this just isn't fair. Thus my blind dangerous logic grows in distress, thus my ignorance turns into a reasoning violence.

My first court date I was denied, because only my grandpa came to petition my release. the judge; however, was not convinced. "A couple months judge," grandpa pleads "and his had will be here." Okay I get a break so in a couple months we will just have to see. I don't want to go to camp or some group home in some unknown place. It just isn't fair, Christmas is in a few weeks and I will have to be stuck in here unless I can get a day pass or overnight leave something they do for some families on Christmas or important circumstances. Feeling of despair, every thought lost in bewilderments of fleeting cares, the monotonous days pass in growing unrest, monotony approaching the brinks of volatile intensity in perilous distress.

My Education

I write letters, but never receive one in return. I made a friend or two, but they always seem to be the ones to go home in a week. I can't stand this Juvy school. What do they think - I didn't start skipping school in the fourth, fifth grade just for fun! I don't understand anything they say, read this or that, hell I can't tell the difference from a run off sentences or a broken paragraph. And how does one of us understand one chapter of a book to the next when everyone in the classroom has the same problem as me, when everyone in the classroom comes from the same broken home, who lacking in nourishments of love, and troubled by the pangs of empty stomachs never had a chance to worry about schools, never had the opportunity to develop a care for educational tools, like our run down local school could provide educational equality. Gym period always seems to be the best, that is when the teacher doesn't make us do some weird exercises for a punishment. Handball, basketball, or some gym game is always the most fun, but we never seem to have enough time to finish one.

Within the first month and a half I'm the kid sweeping the Juvy hallways, I'm the kid all the staff know by name and face,

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Nothing changes. Not bad I dare say. I wake up every morning anticipating breakfast for the day

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I'm the kid who sees everyone leave and return, the kid who in his prolonged stay begins to develop a comradeship with all his like identities thus feeling a sense of love, thus feeling a sense of family in a preternatural sense of development. The food is no longer strange to me. Oatmeal, eggs, potatoes every morning; mystery meat sandwiches, a snack and a piece of fruit every lunch time; and half cooked rice, pasta, chicken or meatloaf with a scoop of jello or slice of cake every dinner. Nothing changes. Not bad I dare say. I wake up every morning anticipating breakfast for the day, I try to rush the hours between morning and noon to escape from the illiterate school. I hurry the hours away in vain (except for gym and movie day in class) and after dinner comes the bittersweet sorrow of the day, a hopeful phone call can be made. I find myself forgetting time occasionally as I'm sweeping the halls or exchanging ghetto tales with another gamin' face, forgetting reality in my anticipations of the orders for the next day. It's only when I find myself back in that graffiti carved, spit stained, stale ventless room that I drift back into that intrinsic darkness of silent reverie, into those lonely depths of a depthless abyss where the tormenting afflictions in my soul, in my dreary soul stirs ominous, brooding, intrepid.

I'm A Teen

I spent my first birthday in Juvenile Hall. I'm thirteen now and it looks like I'll be here for Christmas too. Since I appear to be getting along fine in this stay of Juvenile Hall my Probation Officer said I may have a chance for a Christmas day leave. Now there's a thought that made monotonous hours pass, but hey what has really changed? I learned that Juvenile Hall really ain't that bad. Okay the monotony of the endless time is distressing, frightening to the point of madness on occasions, but that seemed to be comforted by the new sense of family and camaraderie I began developing amongst my fellow juvies who all had the same eyes as me, who all come from the same poverty ridden streets as me. Even a few of the staff were cool. One or two always seemed to have grown up in our very same streets and only narrowly escaped their next generation of prison stats; perhaps with a fortunate had to help or a mentor who intervened at the right time, showing him the ancient road that leads to many wonderful pathways.

What Has Changed?

Again I say what has really changed?! What has really changed?! I say what has Juvenile Hall accomplished in helping me understand society in a better light?! All I know is the streets of despair and depravity, the varrio, the ghetto, the projects... the broken home, the hunger pangs, the leather belt or extension cord, the absence of parental nourishments, I say! The need for the essential elements of nature to nurture the health of a child's soul; love, temperament, humanity, and almost every point made in Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay on "Self Reliance." What has changed? I need that parental nourishment, the feeling of love and loving in return. One is in the fast lane; the other is still in the pen. And I'm still a bewildered 12, 13 year old kid returning back to the same drug addicted, poverty ridden, desolate streets in which I was born.

In retrospect it would appear as if Juvenile Hall's only lesson, only inspiration would be the sense of family and comradeship I began to perhaps unconsciously develop within its walls. So in all true aspects Juvenile Hall was built to teach me what?! A sense of discipline? A sense of responsibility? How to be compassionate? How to love? How to develop educational tools that would give my life direction? How to feel closer to humanity and the free society of which I was supposed to be a part? How to what? What did Juvenile Hall teach me? How to become attached to the stable environment of Juvenile Hall, inspire in me a sense of pride and affection in the cruelest sense, in the most despairing sense, a sense of belonging in the milieu of Juvenile Hall, thus ensuring a bed spot for the future local economy — ensuring my safe return!

They teach you discipline and how to obey. Well I might not like their constant reprimands, but did I like the attention, the sense of acknowledgment? I didn't get none of that in a broken home! How about the warm food and extra trays?! Did I always get that in the ghetto of life?! How about that unit job? Didn't that give me my real first sense of responsibility?! Hmm, things to contemplate. Things that all seem to be very minute in the overbearing shadows of Juvenile Hall. How about sharing those tales from the streets that filled our imaginations with aspirations, envy, and budding pride

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with our second selves? Where else could I find the shared pains of that mirrored reflection of mine?

Two Months and a Day

But hey, what do I know, right? I'm just a 12, 13- year-old juvenile from the dark side of the jungle's pothole streets, and all I want right now is to get out of this place, to get back on my wild streets where the green wonders hold me captive in a hungry fantasy, enchanting my dark afflictions. Where I'm free to ride from place to place, where me and a couple a gamin' spirits can roam in wistful affray until we come up with some mischievous adventures to intrigue the melancholic hours before they come; thus sharing the experiences that would later become our fond memories.

How can I forget those Juvy bingo nights where we can win those generic sodas, cookie packs, or cheese cracker snacks, those days were sometimes the best. And we mustn't leave out Sunday, the day we all sign off for church, pretending to read the Bible passage of the day while we really flirt with the girls on the other side, wishing we could kiss one or maybe just dance! Okay, so maybe dancing isn't quite on our young minds yet, so there we are trying to exchange a hook-up or two for a future time, or perhaps we recognize one and we smile at each other, eyes dancing in the wonders of a pastime that reminds us where we met, thinking how cool it would be if we could hook-up again. Staring at each other oblivious of the church hymns, staring at each other, longing perhaps not just for a kiss, but thinking that somehow you know that one of those girls can truly fill your emptiness.

Two months and a day of monotonous hours spent in the darkness of silent reverie. Two months and a day of tormenting afflictions stirring in the depths of my dreary soul. Two months and a day from morning till night I found myself somewhat intrigued by this new Juvenile Hall. Two months and a day the girls side is for whimps, I now say. Two months and a day, I can't stand this Juvenile school; two months and a day, everyone got a visit except for me, everyone got a letter except for me, everyone got a phone call home, no one answered mine. Two months and a day it seems like I'm the tough kid around here now. Two months a day and I'm the one who's staring around like I have nothing to lose, not a care, the one who gets along just fine with all the empty eyes from ghetto streets. Two months and a day and every one of those days in those two months and a day, I wanted nothing more but to go home. And on Christmas day, the judge granted me an eight-hour leave because of my exceptionally good behavior, and, oh, moms finally pulled over for a second out of the fast lane and petitioned for my mercy. Two months and a day in Juvenile Hall. I embraced my mom for the first time, "Hop in the car mijo, it's time to go cop, I'm sick," she says. "Hey mom, I isn't going back there again," I say. Looking at me she smiles that lovely smile and whispers, "Oh honey, I love you," as she caresses my cheek. An eight-hour leave, yeah right! Not when they just let me back out on the streets! I stare through the windows, intoxicated by freedom's release, convinced at that moment that they will never catch me, yet again, I have this stirring feeling deep inside, ominous, foreboding, incomprehensible, feeling that my journey through Juvenile Hall still has not quite reached its end.

Juvenile Times: My Last Seven-Month "Farewell"

I feel a dark winter wind blowing against the ominous nightlife of mischiefs, I shiver, as it's sharp brisk chill sneaks through my derby collar to caress me like a trembling suitor upon my nape. A silver-menacing glow from the half moon light penetrates through the dim alley of darkness I'm in; a menacing glow pursuing, reproachful, escapeless... My heart is racing, I'm out of breath, I hear the sirens in close pursuit; sirens calling, threatening, demanding, unrelenting. From one dark alley to the next my heart beats in dangerous anticipation, my mind is out pacing my frantic, desperate Nike race. My eyes are trying hopelessly to blink away mary jane's bewildering haze, eyes blinking with devious zeal.

Sirens deafening, whispering in my ear foretelling of a cold darkness to come, foreboding sirens shattering the placid, solemn, mischievous night air, mercilessly pursuing, warning the rest of the unseen night creatures away from their covetous endeavors. Panting, breathless, gasping for air, racing adrenaline pounding with every beat of my anxious heart, dangerous tensions driving the very speeds of an already ill-fated chase. Over fences, through

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I sit there in intake lost in the myriad thoughts of my feral mind.

dim alleys of strife, through strange back yards with starving dogs, pass all the weary souls of the night, my eyes desperately implore through the dense wild jungles of the dark for a hidden corner to escape from my tireless, pursuing beast.

Tainted crimson stains, viscid, like a burgundy violet wine spilled in the chaos of wild times, spilled from the depths of the streets dark soul, drip from condemned hand, and streak my Charlie Brown and Ben Davis pants. Born in the cruelty of the unsparing ghetto streets, this is the jungle in which my gamin' natures have been forged; this is the wilderness where savage instincts determine your strength to survive, where your unruly nature is your salvation to longevity. Where I find myself being hemmed in as the foreboding sirens draw ever near and the helicopter spot light pursues every dark shadow that would bring me a secure reprieve.

"On the ground, hands behind your back, cross your legs, face down, if you make one more I'll be forced to shoot!"... comes the blaring warning from the k-nine (cop) cars ...light flashing, engines idle, mad... "Seditious thoughts run through my head, the dark natures stir in the depths of my young soul, stirring wildly. Bewildered eyes no longer gazing in a mazy green haze; ambivalent eyes staring in a youth of tenebrous rebellion, in a defiant rage. I am fourteen years old, fifteen is more near... I feel the knee of some over grown cop pressing in to my back. Another one holding my neck, while the other brutally slaps the iron cuff on my wrists. Trying to intimidate me with their taunting words—tauntless in the ears of my dark youth, superfluous as they enter in to mocking ears... taunts about Juvenile Hall!

They must not know that's like my second home by now, the must not know that place was built for me; or have they forgotten the daily poverty they patrol, have they forgotten how we insure their monthly paycheck? A bit farfetched to pretend they don't see, if you ask me! Or maybe everyone is just used to it.

I stare out the back of the cop car window thinking I stained my new pants, thinking I'm in serious trouble this time... I gaze at the passing streets of my wild boyhood. I gaze at the familiar street signs that come with your first childhood memories of playing in those streets. I stare longing, remembering another time knowing a cold monotonous dark awaits my company. I stare thinking about an affectionate loved one or two, I stare looking with all eyes somewhat still dazed by a sobering joint or two. Thinking, I'll be back on that street soon. Thinking, I know a girl or homeboy who lives down one dark street or another, as I pass reluctantly by, captive, captured, careless... Thinking, damn I was supposed to call this girl up. Thinking, damn, the homeboy is going to the carnival without me this time. I stare looking at my familiar ghetto streets — not knowing this was the last time they would see me, not knowing that this was going to be my last day of being free... that this was to be the last glimpse of freedom that would be left to my adolescent memories.

As I am being hauled off into the depths of the winter night — towards that darkness that awaits to embrace my young soul, I'm thinking how I started off the day with my creased Ben's, Charlie Brown, and deciding whether I want to wear my Stacy Adams or Nikes while touching up the palm comb class. With a joint in one ear and another lit, talking with one homeboy or another making plans for the day. Then suddenly I feel my resting heart begin a rapid pace, a stir of adrenaline dances in the dark light of my eyes and I grow restless as my mind sees the crimson tears left by the wounded shadows of our perilous life.

I think just another wild night I have survived in the jungle, yet I can't but help feel some deep sorrow of stirring humanity in the depths of my young soul, a stirring however, unable to reach the conscious depths of my adolescent life that has since birth, been nurtured by the desolate, coarse, neglected hand of ghetto cares; unusual by the ancient pacifier of wretched poverty."

"But hey, I'm only a young tough street kid..." so my thoughts wander back to some party I went to that was all the way live, not even vaguely thinking that would be the last party I would jump in — not suspecting that it was the last party I would attend.

The Hall

"Throw him in that tank over there." The Intake staff says, at my arrival, to the cop — not yet catching sight of my face. "What's your name juvenile?!" he says. Looking up at me for the first time he suddenly exclaims: "Hey are you back again? What's going on

with you?!" He says, smiling as he recognizes my face... looking at the reports left by the police. He gives a whistle and says, "well you're in here for the long stay on this one." I smile with all the rebellious mockery of my youth, as I reply, "I started missing you and all those extra trays..." Every one in Intake knows me by now, they look at me perhaps struck for a moment by a sad thought, then brushing it away with a smile and a extra sack lunch they had left on the side. "You know the drill," they say, and without another thought I'm back in to the daily Juvenile Hall routine.

I sit in the cold silence of my concrete cage no longer intimidated by its perpetual stare, no longer swayed by its stoic glare. My eyes implore the wild darkness for it's tepid embrace. I'm embraced by the enchanting darkness of depravity; my young soul had already been lost in the inherent darkness of the ghetto life, had already found the inevitable road leading him into a world beyond the tiny walls of his Juvenile Hall. Beyond the life of battery packs and razors melees of CYA, into the infernal depths of a prison's dark rage, into an incessant darkness of depravity that would devour even the intrepid flames that flicker in the dark shadows of prison walls."

I sit there in intake lost in the myriad thoughts of my feral mind. I sit there in intake ready to go to the ghetto side where my face is familiar to the eyes of all. Where my eyes see the integral afflictions that torment the souls of poverty, in a struggle to free themselves from the grip of Juvenile Hall; desperately struggling to escape from the impoverished despairs that weigh so heavily upon their homeless hearts.

I walk through that same ghetto corridor that seemed to intimidate my young eyes years before, that how appear to me as a distant thought that has long lost its care. As I enter into my unit, a few steps tougher up in age, now that I'll be fifteen soon, I glance around and see a familiar face or two and nod in the casual silent, "what's up! Q'vo!" As I continue to scope out the day room, noticing several new faces looking at me, I notice one or two tough kids staring a moment too long, they haven't met me yet obviously, I guess I'll have to introduce myself another time whether they like it or not and show them this is now my Juvie place.

I have embraced the darkness that for so long frightened me with its eerie whispers of insensate feelings. I'm now whispering the dark cold endearments to the Juvie souls that share my afflicted, lonely, beseeching, seditious eyes of the barrio, ghetto streets, of broken homes and frigid poverties.

I sit in the deafening silence of monotony as I fill the empty hours exchanging mischievous tales with my fellow Juvie souls — while we probably are contemplating the mischiefs of the next day; maybe there will be a little riot or spontaneous me'lee, we are the gamin spirits who found our lonesome natures unruly, forged together in our desperate need for a sense of family in our want to belong, to be loved, thus we found ourselves in a bond of tribal-like unity.

Silently, during the early first weeks of Juvenile Hall, my primary concerns revolve around the impending court dates, the implications in the court rhetoric that always seem to frighten our young minds with visions of doing time for a hundred years or some even darker vision of having to face some unknown darkness in a far off strange place, convinced we will probably lose an eye or get fatally wounded there. So we begin to develop an aggressive impulse, an automatic defensive/ hostile mechanism provoked by our own vulnerable fears. Whilst my restless thoughts of fresh memories on the streets begin to lose their sense of immediate importance with each monotonous day lasting longer in the shadows of Juvie life, with each passing day of venturing further into the darkness of mischievous intrigues... intrigued by the sense of tribal-like unity.

CYA Bound?

My second court date within a month, I find out they want to send me to CYA, "CYA! What about camp? What about a group home? Even some far off program?" I declare, perhaps just somewhat startled because the thought hasn't really quite sunk in ... "but wait I don't really care, didn't somewhere along the way I develop a longing curiosity in CYA. If pops and other loved ones all been there, isn't that the where the true strong survive, isn't that the place where I'll learn how to be tough just like them" —CYA ain't nothing they always said "you're tough just like us" and they would whisper a

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With each court date preceding the last, the more convinced I am that my CYA fate has come

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secret knowledge in you ear and by its possession, convincing you that now some how you already have an upperhand.

Defiant, rebellious, scared, cruel, timid, I stand in the tall shadows of Juvenile Hall facing CYA time... I feel a deep vulnerability of fear, of doubt growing inside the internal conflicts of the soul, threatening to unbalance my fragile mind, that is until the external forces of depravity, of the dark pressures of Juvie Hall register back into the wild darkness of conscious sight to repress any perceived vulnerabilities that might attempt to develop into compassionate affinities, into a sense of true humanity... where the dark impulses in progressing manifestations of depravity allow no room.

With each court date preceding the last, the more convinced I am that my CYA fate has come, the more I begin to lose care, as I run deeper into the depths of darkness, losing sight of freedoms sense... A riot here and there, a me'lee, I no longer care, even the tough kids in Juvie revere me, only a few like natures have grown cold like me. A few like natures who share the same fate as I, who has grown up in the wretched poverty of life. Who lost themselves in that same inexorable darkness as I.

Juvenile Isolation

Within two months, I find myself at home in the Juvie trenches, in the Juvenile Hall holes, losing myself in the icy concrete, colorless walls of a staring, strange silence, penetrating the wildness in my soul. Paralyzing me for a moment in its deep isolation, the timeless impulse momentarily suspended in privation, the external pressures briefly arrested in a solitary cage. Contemplating the next juvenile me'lee... the next esteemed endeavor of tribal—unity...thus insuring greater tribal esteem"

Note; the Juvenile hole/ Juvenile trenches, hole seem to be very similar to the deafening silence of my first experiences inside "intake," and later experiences there. Only with the added knowledge I was being punished for hostile or defensive reactions or actions. However after the initial impact of my first stay in isolation, which lasted two weeks of sitting in my cell twenty-four hours a day — with one hour out of my isolation room every other night—and a shower as often as the cops wasn't lazy. Besides them taking my mattress every morning, at five in the morning, and serving me with food trays that had a bug or two in there, sometimes, I sat there in abstract thought. At times, perhaps, I felt an utter sense of despair, but because perhaps I had endured so many abuses and restrictions or deprivations as a gamin in the ghetto life along with a combination of analogous experiences character of that lifestyle — all of which helped allow me to easily adapt/ grow accustom to long periods of solitude in isolation. Thus, instead of isolation serving its intended design for punishment and conformity, it became an unconscious affinity to my wild natures. Of course I didn't like the idea of going or being in juvenile isolation, yet neither did I find myself dreading the atmosphere of the hole, despite all the attempts by the cops/staff to provoke distress at every sign of peace.

Where I saw some young kids like me, banging on walls, attempting to hurt themselves, screaming madly, I seemed to adapt to the habits of isolation with little effort, that is, after the initial prolonged silences has passed. The initial assault of monotony oppressive in its nature of totality... that often reminded you of some forgotten freedom that resurfaced from your dark depths, that momentarily strived the suppressed natures of longing, which always seemed to bring your thoughts to a fated despair—thus leaving you in a state of melancholy until you found some external idea to entertain your imagination with. While anticipating the counting days of returning back to your unit where the Juvenile homeboys proudly greet, revere, embrace your presence/ your return

I would spend many more occasions in juvenile isolation

before my final departure, the longest being a month and a half.

Over the next couple months I found myself lost in the milieu of juvenile life, while every day contemplating my CYA fate. I had no idea this would be my last time seeing the inside of my what had become my beloved Juvenile Hall. I had yet to realize the feeling of a, of my bittersweet goodbye. Nothing ever changed in the daily routine of Juvenile Hall except when the occasional little riot or melee occurred. And yet does not the endless cycle of such disturbing violent reoccurrences in the daily behavioral patterns of Juvenile Hall become an essential feature of its very infrastructure.

I sat there in Juvenile Hall for the countless time, remembering my first time I spent ten days here when I was nine years old, confused, scared, wondering. Remembering how I came back on a few minor occasions at eleven and twelve, remembering when I first come to the boy's side frightened vulnerable within, yet rebellious, defiant on the facade as I began to succumb to the external darkness of ill-fated curiosities at the age of twelve, thirteen. And how I stood on the run for about six months, one time, before I got caught again, luckily it was just for that ol' Christmas leave, absconding warrant. I got released in a week — pops spoke up for mine. Remembering how I was running wild, confused, neglected, careless, reckless, dangerous at the age of thirteen, fourteen, how now, I sat in Juvenile Hall, fourteen going on fifteen with the judge's ruling, echoing over and over in my deaf ear, with the judge's voice ruling my fate in a single condemned sentenced finality that was thousands of miles away from reaching the dark depths of my defiant ears.

The Last Time

I sat there in Juvenile Hall for the last time, at age fifteen, not understanding I had lost, just lost the freedom of my young life, that I had just lost the freedom of my young adult life to come... that I had lost the true freedoms I never really knew I ever possessed! I lost a freedom that already seemed to have been lost in the despairing youth of my melancholied emptiness, in the cold dregs of ghetto streets, in the broken home of perilous distress, in the malnutritions of loveless nourishments in the missing touch from humanity."

There I sat for the last time in Juvenile Hall contemplating how tough I'll be in CYA thinking how I'm ready to show CYA just how bad I am. Only abstractly remembering the distant echo from the judge in my ear, "I hereby sentence you juvenile' to thirteen years in CYA." Juvenile life, he says "you have been condemned," which means I'll get out when I'm twenty-five, lest I find my way into the dark shadows of state prisons' rage some where along my journey though CYA.

But hey I'm only fourteen, fifteen years old I'm no fortune teller or psychic hot line. What do I know, right? I'm the tough kid who's been in and out of Juvenile Hall since the age of nine; I'm the tough kid who is ready to take on every CYA from Preston, Nellis, YTS, and Chad... I should have enough time, you think?

There I Sit

There I sit for the last time gazing out the back window trying to steal a peak of the night moon there, trying to catch a drift of wild air from a crack, thinking about my loved ones who never seemed to be there, or are lost in a similar cage of despair. There I sit in the midst of my collective shadows regretting one moment and forgetting the next. There I sit justifying, rationalizing, convinced the world is against me. There I sit in Juvenile Hall for the last night, then tomorrow I'm off to CYA" There I sit, my haggard soul alone, afflicted in despairs... There I sit watching the darkness of the night slowly engulf the brooding peaks of the moon. There I sit lonesome, dreary in a strange detachment watching the remnants of my Juvenile times slip away — slipping away into the dark cold, unfeeling wild secret night.

There I sit lonesome, dreary in a strange detachment watching the remnants of my Juvenile times slip away

the beat without

PURE DRAGON CYA

Run

Run-why do people run? Sometimes people run because they are in a hurry to go somewhere. Some run because they are being chased. Some people run miles everyday for their health; some for sports.

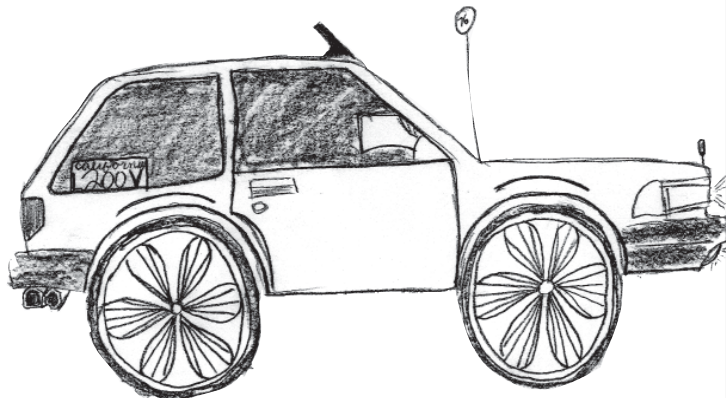
But why do we run? Aren't we constantly running away from someone or for something?

I once can for my life when I was being chased by 30 or so something heads. And I have been running away from reality for 15 years. For 15 years I have runaway from reality, not realizing it until I was separated from the ones I love. And when I can't deal with problems I create or problems that are thrown at me that I can't solve, I run.

Why does people like to run? Some run and don't realize the outcome of it. Of course, I am talking about running away from problems, group homes, camp, etc.. Why is that? For instant, during my stay at YGC I have seen a lot of juveniles, so call detainees like me, come back after being placed in a group home or some other program that allows you to have home pass or G-8 months program. Why do they run, why can't they do their program and get out free, with no string or a dog leech around their neck? Is it the temptation that gets to them? I just don't understand.

Of course I'm still quite young and there's still a lot to learn. But why run? I can't even answer that myself. Maybe, just maybe, we run because we can't face reality; the truth!

THE BEAT



Thoughts from CYA

I can't understand why everywhere I go, it's the same. What I am talking about is gang-banging in jail. Fighting for no damn reason and not giving a funk if they catch an additional six months time add. What do you think makes people this way?

Just a few hours ago (It is now nine something in the evening) two fights occurred. I'll have to say this, those two fights were pointless. One happened because a white guy thought the blacks were after him, which was not true at all, and rushed a Pacific Islander. that was an Islander not an African American. The second fight was between a Asain guy.

Mervyn Wool Beat colleague/Formal CYA Ward

**I once can for my
life when I was being
chased by 30 or so
something heads.**

The 90 Days Red Zone

As of today, April 30, I have been out (paroled from CYA) and I am out of what they (parole) call the 90 days red zone. Which means the first 90 days of your parole is the hardest. Meaning they are more hard and strict on you. I have passed the first test of parole and I have to pass the rest.

You know what? Being on parole is not as hard as some people says and also, it's not as hard as some people think; like myself. I first thought parole was going to be easy but it's not. Parole is never easy, it is up to me to make it easy for myself.

Part of one of my many parole conditions (thing I have to follow or do while on parole) is that I have to attend NA (Narcotics Anonymous) meeting once a week. And that sometimes frustrate me, because I don't need it. I no longer fiend or even think about drugs. Yes, I have done drugs, and yes, I thought I was in control. but I've changed. When I attend these NA meetings I hear people talking about how they sometimes think about using again and how when they are stressing, they have this temptation to go and use. I can't related to them!! I understand what they are talking about, but I just can't related maybe because I can't see myself being that way. But hey, I have to look on the bright side right? Even though I don't want to go, I have too and sometimes what these people have to say are very interesting. I can learn something from it. But...like I said, I don't need this NA stuff!!

Now I can see why sometimes so many people relapse or recommit. Because freedom might be good, but it 's what comes with the freedom that some are scare of. The

RESPONSIBILITY and STRESS.

As a 20 year old young male on parole, I am living on my own, paying my own rent, both phone bills and I work. But sometimes that is very stressful plus now my girl is hella paranoid, she keep thinking she's pregnant and that really stresses me out sometimes. There's a saying "If you are ready to do it, then you are ready for it (it meaning the baby)," but you know what? I am not ready for the baby and neither is my girl. Nevertheless, I will be responsible and go through this with her if she is pregnant (which I hope not).

This is what I think people sometimes recommit: 1) they can't handle the pressure of being responsible because they are so use to being fed 3 meals a day and don't need to worry about nothing 2) Because some of them that do recommit does have a family or home to go to, therefore they commit crime to get locked up. I mean, what so they have to lose? They get feed 3 means a day, the have a bed to sleep, a doctor to care for them, and they can get a free education. And what about those that are on the street begin for a few pennies so they can feed themselves and some them even have a few kids? Can the system blame them? Before they even think about locking them up, they should think about if they (the system) have tried to help them.

But hey, I'm off the subject, I was just talking about parole and I have no idea how I end up talking about all this. Weird huh? Yea, I know, it's okay though. Well, that's it for me now, and to those that's wondering how much longer of parole I got left, the answer is 6, yeah, not 6 months but 6 years.

I had troubles coming from everywhere, in court, in school, in the unit, and at home.

**Dat Nguyen
High Desert State Prison**

My Juvenile Hall Experience

It wasn't too long ago when I left Santa Clara County Juvenile Hall. Matter of fact, it was only four and a half month ago. I was housed there for two years. I came in on my 16th birthday. Two years later, a week after my 18th birthday, I was sentenced to prison with an 18 year term.

A week after that, I was sent to San Quentin (reception center). To now, I'm currently being housed at High Desert State Prison. I came across this topic many times, and now I'm finally going to get a chance to put it down and share it with you.

On the night of my 16th birthday I was arrested for three counts of attempted murder, premeditated and gang related. I was booked in County (Jail) because I fell under the Proposition 21, that came out in January 2000. They housed me in Juvenile Hall due to my age.

My first nine months in the Hall was nothing but trouble. From the time I was facing, to the gang bullshhh I was into. Fight after fight, write-ups and problems with counselors and staffs. I was a hard headed boy.

My family was always there for me no matter what I put them through. But I didn't realize it then, and I wanted to ride.

There were good counselors in the unit at that time and they gave me good advice, but I didn't take it seriously enough. Part of it had to do with the time I was facing, and part of it had to do with me, well most of it. I just wasn't ready to let go of everything I did for the gang. I don't know why it didn't hit me then. I was mad because I took it for the gang and the boys, and then all these people told me just to forget about it and let all that gang b-s go. I wasn't ready, period.

I was facing triple life's for something I didn't do, and I am going to ride it out for the homies and now all of a sudden you tell me to stop!? Hell no! I wasn't going to change. My attitude was screw it. I was a young and ignorant teenager. I had troubles coming from everywhere, in court, in school, in the unit, and at home.

Nine months after I was booked, a new group of counselors were assigned to the max unit. They shut down the unit because of the gang related incidents that happened few days before shift change. I wasn't involved, because I was out playing handball in the courtyard, everyone was surprised. The new group of counselors were stricter and tighter, so I knew it was going to be hard to get over them. They brought us out day after day to lecture us as a group, which bored me. Before that we hardly got lecture.

I was confused, confused with what to do with my life and my time at the moment. Even though I was confused, I knew I needed to get myself in shape, physically and mentally.

A few weeks after my seventeenth birthday, I took a plea bargain. The plea bargain was a 18 year prison term. It was a shock to me when they wanted to lock me up with more time than I ever lived. I just wanted it to be over with, all the court related matter. My family was worrying day and night, so I just want to get it over with.

I asked the judge to allow me to stay at the Hall to finish high school. He agreed. So time, after time, they prolonged my sentencing date. While waiting for court, I took advantage to all the chances I could get to helping, me get my mind right and body in shape for the big house.

During the time I waited for court, I got to know all my favorite counselors better and it was the other way around too. I finally made up my mind to put it all behind me. I focused on improving myself, mentally and physically. I didn't want and tried to not to let anyone hold me back. I tried not to depend on anyone, in a good and discipline way. I started to learn from my mistakes and others. I started to observe my surroundings and the people around me. I listen to the wise words that were told to us at morning and at night.

As I got to know some of the counselors, we had a good time. The whole unit did. That helped me a whole lot. I learned discipline from one, patience from another, and humor and health tips, etc... It goes on. They helped me and gave me countless advice. They assured me that I'd be okay wherever I will go. The unit had structure. Now to think of it, that year in max unit was the easiest time I done so far. The unit ran smoothly, from minors, teachers (some), counselors to the supervisors. Everybody's day went by

fast.

On my high school graduation day, everyone showed up. My parents, teachers, even the supervisors and almost all the counselors. Some were on their day off too. It surprised me to see so many people cared. I'll never forget that day. I was happy and I knew I did a lot of things right lately. Not to say that I never slipped, but I learn from it, and tried to use it as an example so I can avoid it in the long run. I was and still am learning

No good or bad time last forever. Every trip has it's end. So when I found out that a new group of counselors was coming into (the unit) replace them, I was sad. Not that the new group were bad. But it was going to be different because some of them had helped me so much. They were there with me, to help me when I needed or asked. They help me to a certain point where their job allowed them to. We had the best program in the Hall at the time, an easy but tight program. We were one of the two max unit in the Hall after all.

Throughout the years, many counselors was surprised when they look at my files with all the I-R's (incident reports). A lot of people had asked me why I changed. I didn't change for any parent or anyone. I changed for myself. Of course seeing my family hurting didn't make me happy at all. But I guess it was time to grow up. I realized and understood for myself.

The whole time I was there (in the Hall) I didn't get no "hi" or "how are you" from my old friends. There were a few that wrote, but it was a few. Most were in the Hall with me this time and because of being there they know how it was. The one that were there with me throughout, and most of my time there, they understood me much better. I think because we were on the same boat, the boat that was heading for the Pen. We became tighter through the years, as we drop the street b-s. Sometimes it tripped the counselors out. Some of them know how we were on the streets. We put all that behind us because it didn't do us no good. It had gotten us here (in the Hall) in the first place. The one that couldn't become friends, we gave each other enough space to do our thing.

My time at the Hall was definitely a life time, learning experience. I learned so much. It's a shame that I had to go to jail to learn what I could of learn, if I simply listen to my father and all the people that tried to get it through my thick head. But it was good to learn, period, it was better than hide from it. Even though I dealt with a lot of court issues while I was there, but yet all the positive stuff made up for it, in one way or another.

A lot of counselors made it easier for me as they helped me to understand. It was on me also. Because before I can let anyone help me, I have to have the will power to help myself and wanting help.

Unfortunately, not every unit in the Hall is like the unit I was in. And not all the counselors there are the same as the ones I know. This is only my opinion and experience.

There are a lot of counselors out there that are devoted and want to make a difference. They want to help the youth straighten up and understand the big picture, not just the present. They are the ones that will treat all the minors the same, no matter what kind of charge we came in for, or what it says on our police report. That was what the group of counselors and some of the other ones did for me/us. We were lucky and I am forever grateful. They got to know us and they did not treat us like what we were labeled, as killer teens.

We should understand that their job is not to be our friends, their job is to feed us, clothe us, give us shower, give us shelter and make sure that we are safe. And some of them go out of there way and take time to help. Some of them were there one way or another, believe it or not. Of course there are always some that just wanted the job for the money and the benefits. Remember, just don't treat people the way you don't want them to treat you: "Don't judge the book by it's cover." You don't have to be their friends or make them yours. You don't have to spill your guts to them and kiss ass. Just make sure there is an understanding between you and whoever you're dealing with. Just like any relationship. Understanding and respect are the keys. Remember "tough time won't last, tough people will."

Lastly, I want to thank all the counselors, teachers, supervisors and friends that had helped me over the years. You know who you are and you are appreciated.

Michael Markhasev Corcoran State Prison

Getting rid of problems is never easy

What May Be Done To Improve The Juvenile Justice System As A Whole?

Without a doubt, this very complicated and difficult question cannot be answered as easily as it is asked. Oftentimes, when considering what is wrong with our youth today, we hear the sincere lamentation, "Oh, yes, the system has failed!" Yet as genuine (and perhaps, even as correct) as that heartfelt complaint may be, I believe that it isn't entirely enough to unearth the problem or merely distribute blame to the guilty parties (which is always easy and pleasant) for the failures in our juvenile justice system. What we truly need are real answers, practical solutions which may be applied today, now, and make a difference. When a house is burning, the important thing isn't to point out that someone should have installed the sprinklers or shouldn't have built it out of plywood. Rather what needs to be done is to extinguish the blaze and furthermore, what it takes to keep the flame from spreading into other buildings. It is even so with the Juvenile Justice System. However, prior to providing possible solutions, we need to assess the problem: what was the Juvenile Justice System's original design, where and why is it failing, and then – and only then – what may be done to improve it.

If the Criminal Justice System (as a whole) is an agency which is supposed to battle and eradicate criminality and corruption in our society, then its juvenile department is the first line of defense in this war. Its function is simple: to prevent, limit and punish delinquency (meaning "antisocial or illegal behavior by minors") before it develops into hardened criminality and an individual becomes a habitual offender, an adult criminal. If a survey were to be done in prisons all across the nation, we'd discover that most of today's inmates have had some sort of contact with the juvenile justice system prior to graduating (if it may be called that) to the ranks of its adult counterpart. There's a thin line between juvenile delinquency and full-fledged adult criminality, and if changes are to be made in one's life, it ought to take place in a young, impressionable mind, when (in most cases) chances are plenty, future is open, and when after successful completion of things required, the juvenile record may be sealed and a young adult enters into adulthood as a new creature, legally untarnished and unchallenged by past errors, blunders and what we've come to know as "the mistakes of youth."

The juvenile justice system was designed to be a hospital for the sick, misguided, neglected youth. Unlike the adult justice system, it doesn't begin with "corrections" but rather social services, counseling, probation, work crews, placements, etc. In theory, only after those are exhausted we come to Juvenile Halls, camps and the Youth Authority. Thus, if designed to be a hospital for the sick, its patients are placed therein in hope of being made whole again, cured of whatever it is that ails them – be it drug or alcohol problems, gang mentality, rebellion or simply temporary "insanity" which is known to especially afflict teens – and turn Dr. Jekylls into Mr. Hydes. Surely no one would consider it "sane" or "rational," the desire to kill (or even be killed) for a piece of sidewalk which one doesn't even own, or to risk one's life for a momentary dope high, or to throw away one's family and future for a miserable life on the streets. Is that logical or sane, or is the rest of the world simply stupid and has yet to figure out that this ingenuity and pearls of wisdom which are found all throughout American Juvenile Halls, placements and camps? I mean, come on, let's be honest here...

Indeed, the Juvenile Justice System is designed to make the youth well, to rehabilitate the young people – willingly or unwillingly – and just as a hospital isn't made to send its occupants to the morgue, even so, the juvy system isn't supposed to be a pathway into the world of adult corrections. Willingly or unwillingly I say because even in the adult world a drug addict doesn't always

embrace the idea of a rehab system and an alcoholic isn't too anxious to join AA, but both are necessary to make the individual well and be healed of the infirmity.

The Juvenile System works in a similar fashion. It treats the runaways as well as the castaways, drug addicts as well as the children of addicted, victims and perpetrators alike. Some people get run over by cars, which isn't their fault. Others bring upon themselves health problems by smoking or drinking too much, yet both are sent to the same place of treatment, with the hopes of getting better... Getting rid of problems is never easy, but whatever unpleasantness one is forced to endure, they are outweighed by afterward benefits. No one is ever too excited about becoming an inhabitant of the Juvenile Justice System, but for a delinquent child whose mind has been warped by drugs, crime and corruption, this is needful for healing and rehabilitation. This decision must be imposed upon them not only by "the system" and the letter of the law, but also by those who truly care about them after all other means of turning away of delinquency have been exhausted because correction and discipline are a very important part of rehabilitation. Unlike morning mist, problems don't evaporate on their own, and anyone who has children knows this. If plants require pruning and trimming, and animals need disciplining, how much more so people?

Of course, everything that I have mentioned is the ideal, the way things OUGHT to be – far from what they are. But this is why it is so highly important to solve the "problem of crime" at a juvenile level, while it is easier to stop a young offender in his tracks than to reform a hardened criminal whose change of thinking is less likely. Crime is a terrible cancer, and if left unchecked it destroys all in its path. The juvenile justice system has the crucial responsibility of keeping this cancer from developing and spreading in its earliest stages.

So then WHY IS IT FAILING TO DO SO? The reasons are many and complex, the reality of it quite tragic. We may begin the blame game by pointing the finger at ourselves, because the juvy system is a sad reflection of our society itself. If one were to measure our culture's temperature, the most sound thermometer would be the state of our youth – for they are our future and what will become of our world. We oftentimes forget the African proverb that "It takes a village to raise a child," and, sure enough, a village to corrupt one. No one is born with a criminal mindset or an uzi in hand, and what we are is what we acquire on the path of life, be it good or evil. We are the stones washed over and shaped by the river of life, and when considering what is washing over the minds and hearts of our young people, is it at all surprising that today's Juvenile Halls are filled with robbers, killers and violent felons? They are carbon copies of their environments and their desires, molded by the world wherein they spend their days, and it's not only reasonable but necessary to point out that society is largely responsible for our youth's delinquency and, quite honestly, its demise.

Many of the young people who are entangled in the Juvenile Justice System are already broken by the time they make their first encounter. They come from broken homes and they attend broken schools. They live and grow in broken neighborhoods, where they witness the law of the land being broken every day. Violent like their fathers (those that have fathers in their lives), negligent like their mothers, simply not caring about anything worthy – just as no one cares about them. How few and rare are their role models who are deserving to fill those shoes! In their stead they worship gangsters and drug dealers, adopted by the streets, the drug high and a life of crime taking up the precious space where love, care and devotion should have been. The young, tender minds aren't occupied with things worthy of learning, but rather energy and time are devoted to studying how to become cool, accepted; how to learn the trade of crime and how to get away with it; how to become a rebel than a righteous citizen.

Who is to be held responsible for the condition of our youth

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coming to the system itself, one phrase is sufficient to describe the madness that goes on within

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before they even come to a Juvenile Hall, and are already rebellious, anti-social, delinquent and criminal-minded? What control, what monetary capacity, what freedoms, what political clout are children afforded other than what is GIVEN to them by parents, teachers, other adults in the community? Personally, I blame the negligent parent who doesn't care; the foolish neighbor who buys that kid beer or cigarettes; the indifferent teacher who neglects his/her civic responsibility; the idiot entertainer who plants seed of depravity and lewdness in a tender young mind; the crooked cop whose heart is hardened to a plight that's not his own; and the greedy politician who knowingly (and for political reasons) disregards his/her duty to the community which put him/her in a position of power, in a position to truly make a difference... With each young person that's processed through reception of a juvenile detention center, there ought to be a couple of adults processed at a local county jail for having failed that child at some stage of his/her life. In reality, when a youth becomes acquainted with the Juvenile Justice System, the prevalent mentality in our society declares that young person a failure, a bad apple so to speak, yet failing to realize that the "entire orchard is rotten to the core," as said Billy Graham.

And now, coming to the system itself, one phrase is sufficient to describe the madness that goes on within: The whole head is sick! It's obvious that the more time a young man or woman spends inside the system, the more institutionalized he/she will become. That's a fact of life, yet it seems that the latest ideology that's been adopted by the juvy system is that of its adult counterpart: LOCK 'EM UP. Send some fourteen year olds to state prisons (as adults). Do nothing to change their mentality or prepare them to be released into society as functioning members. There are no expectations, only pacifications. A friend of mine has compared this situation to a swarm of hornets, wasps, black widow spiders and tarantulas being placed in a glass jar with the hope that somehow, through a magical transformation, they will become gentle butterflies upon their release. Is this for real?

The result is a highly unstable environment, which does nothing to change the already existing delinquent mentality, which only breeds corrupt thinking, promotes criminal behavior and produces individuals who are completely unprepared to be released back into society. Little is done to address the special needs of the children, who need more attention, extra care and effective treatment. They are surrounded (in most cases) with indifferent and callous staff, ill-equipped for the task of rehabilitation – only babysitting – whose primary functions are to know how to use pepper spray, count the silverware, fill up the log book and order the youth around. If the Juvenile Justice System is mandated to be a "temporary parent" of the youth who are placed in its care, I'm afraid that the system itself ought to be put on trial for negligence and child endangerment. Most of the young people come in with an already warped mentality, no respect for authority, emotionally unstable and mentally undeveloped. While in custody an average youth puts on a few pounds, learns how to make his/her bed, how to commit better crimes, perhaps gets into a few fights, and heads back into the world hardly "rehabilitated," with the same thinking, in most instances, back into the same environment, same friends, conditions and lack of opportunities, stamped with the mark of a second-class citizen. The burden of change is placed upon him (which is necessary for everyone), yet the answers, tools and incentives for this change aren't provided or are simply neglected and are overshadowed by other things which profit nothing.

Prior to moving on to "solutions" I need to state that the above-mentioned wrongs, failures and problems are only described in general terms, and not each case specifically with each circumstance and peculiarity involved.

It would be a gross injustice on my part to fail to mention and recognized (rightfully) the positive things, as well as the unaccounted factors. For instance, those hard-working parents who

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do all they can to steer their beloved child away from destruction, yet who are simply unable to watch them twenty-four hours a day. The counselors and supervisors in the system whose hearts are sincere in changing the troubled teens and who truly care about the youth, yet because of general indifference and the bureaucratic red tape with funds allotted (yes, everything in our world revolves around money) are able to do little more than transform one life at a time. Without proper funding even the noblest intentions are thwarted and buried in their infancy...

It would be wrong for me to lump together all of the youth, as though they are all maniacs and failures – no – and I want to acknowledge and take off my hat to those courageous souls who, in spite of all obstacles, do change, do succeed, and are examples for the rest of us. As I've mentioned earlier, each case is unique. We're not all by-products of the same machine. We may not know all of the factors involved which contribute to each case which contribute to the youth's demise and the system's failure, but one thing is certain. The scarlet line of failure runs all through the system like the San Andreas Fault, and a major quaking needs to take place in order for change to triumph. WHAT WE HAVE TODAY SIMPLY ISN'T WORKING, AND WITHOUT NEW TOOLS, CHANGE IS DIFFICULT AT BEST.

Naturally, the next obvious question is what needs to be done in order to shift the heavy wheel of change? Despite all of the barriers and stagnations which need to be overcome, the much-needed solutions, I believe, are available today, and are found within the problem itself. There are good people, just as there are good programs within the system, but because of their limited influence and because "change" is always a bad word when it comes to transforming the status quo, it's almost as if the positive things which are available are forced to swim against the dominant current of thinking and doing things "the old way" in the Juvenile Justice System.

It's obvious that as of right now, the system isn't working. It's merely a revolving door, a stepping stone to adult institutions. The first thing that needs to be done is FIND OUT WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T. There is simply no wisdom in persisting in that which is broken and useless. There is no use (or excuse) in dishing out millions of taxpayer dollars for programs and expenditures which neither rehabilitate the offender nor provide safety for the public. Even a horse can understand this. There are no quick fixes to this very serious problem. Surely change is a long, laborious (sometimes painful) process, and even finding out what works and what doesn't will take time, patience, successes and failures, but this is the only reasonable path en route to solving the problem of systematic failure. A "Band-Aid" approach simply won't do it.

And in order for any change to even be contemplated, there has to be a shift in mentality within the overseers of the Juvenile Justice System. Change is an inside job, and it has to begin with the people inside: staff, directors, supervisors, etc. Anyone who has ever been in contact with the system (be it as a staff member or as a resident) knows that the general ideology of those in charge is that the youth nowadays is beyond the reach of rehabilitation, and that the only feasible solution is "containment" until the adult criminal system takes over and deals with them "accordingly." When, around such individuals, change is mentioned, or rehabilitation is offered as part of the solution, the usual response borders along the lines of, "What? These monsters – change? They will never change, and I have thirty years of juvy system experience to verify that!" Sure, everyone knows that thirty years of useless ideologies and programs will never bring about change (even if you try them one hundred years) and it's insane to think that doing the same thing will somehow bring about change...

Don't get me wrong. I'm not propagating the "no punishment doctrine." No. Punishment of criminal behavior is necessary, and is part of rehabilitation in teaching the offender that there is a

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many institutions (of the juvenile system) have good counselors

price to pay for the breaking of the law. But it's not enough to punish only, to send teenagers to prison, expecting them to change spontaneously, like a snake sheds its skin. What's needed is a mentality that change is possible, is needed, and is readily within reach for those who sincerely desire it. Amazingly and thankfully, as I have mentioned earlier, the answers are found within the system, and many good tools are already available.

For example, many counties have structured boot camps, fire camps, community outlets, alternative sentencing programs, intervention programs, group homes, etc. which are designed to provide the troubled youths with education, job skills and vocational training, discipline and, God willing, some incentives to do right when they are released back into society. But, because the majority of counselors and POs are indifferent or negligent, and because the youth does not receive the much-needed guidance, whatever skills are acquired and whatever gains are made, they are nullified by the absence of direction. One must remember that delinquent teens require special attention to address their special needs. A criminal can be taught how to use a chainsaw or how to put out fires, but unless the criminal mentality is knocked out of him, unless he is shown WHY he ought to use his new skills and WHAT are the advantages, he will still be a criminal upon his/her release and long-term change is highly doubtful.

In another case, many institutions (of the juvenile system) have good counselors, provide powerful speakers who with patience and love teach and encourage the youngsters to depart from drug and crime infested lifestyles and to apply themselves unto better things. They change the kids from within. But, because they lack the necessary finances to set up training programs and are faced with bureaucratic barriers of program allocation, internal politics, etc., they are left only with good plans and intentions but nothing concrete (job skills, education, training, etc.) to offer to the youth. Thus, in essence, the youngster who came in as a criminal is no longer a criminal by obligation, but because he has no skills or avenues by which he may do good, he is encouraged (inadvertently) to revert back to his criminal thinking and to do THE ONLY THING WHICH HE KNOWS HOW TO DO. That's the bottom line, and these two aspects must somehow be reconciled in order for there to be "success."

More so, since this is a problem which affects the entire community, it's mandatory that the whole community becomes involved in making the Juvenile Justice System more effective. Everyone needs to participate. As says the ancient maxim, "You're either part of the problem or part of the solution." Parents, schools, social programs and services, religious faculties, junior sports leagues, the business community – everyone is able to contribute and needs to do so in order to make a difference. Everything starts with people, and if the entire community is united, then the problem is tackled from every angle: domestic, social and material (money-wise). This also places RESPONSIBILITY upon the entire community and members thereof, but the benefits are tremendous, and likewise everyone benefits.

Many pieces of the puzzle are already in place: ROP (Rites of Passage) programs are widely available and government subsidized, community mentoring programs are there, church programs are there in every major city, charity-sponsored community centers, boys/girls clubs, and other affairs designed to minister to America's ghettos have been there for decades. Many other religious and government programs which work together with the juvy system

(Victory Outreach, Big Brother mentoring, Boys/Girls Clubs of America to name a few) exist as well. But all of these are not enough if they do not work together. A trickle here and a trickle there isn't sufficient to alleviate a full-blown drought, but an unleashing of a mighty, united current of the entire community is what's needed.

Without a doubt, the law enforcement agencies and our lawmakers play a crucial role. In some neighborhoods it's not even safe to walk to school and gangs own parks, street corners and entire blocks in the inner cities. That has to change, but without the funds to provide inner cities with alternatives, outlets in communities, and other programs, such changes are very difficult. Nowadays, it takes \$30,000-\$50,000 to lock up a youth for a year in a Juvenile, YA or state facility. That's a huge amount of money! Think of all the ways the community may be able to use those same funds for deterrence, intervention (drug/alcohol treatment) and prevention! A year in the Juvenile Justice System does little to change the youth, but a year of investing in the community makes a difference in the lives of entire families!

It's equally important to get involved those who have been in the system, who have tasted the bitter fruit thereof and who have gone through the difficult process of self-renewal and rehabilitation. "It takes one to know one," the proverb says, and there are many former criminals, gang members, and ex-cons who sincerely want to contribute to society in a positive manner, to work with the youth, to make a difference, and who know WHAT IT TAKES TO CHANGE: to break the chains of dope-fiend mentality, the gangster mentality, the criminal frame of mind. It's highly important to involve people who know the difference between fact and fiction, who discern what works and what doesn't. It's ignorant and foolish to simply say, "We know better than you," because there has to be an inside track. When forming battle plans against a foreign land, the best intelligence is gathered from those who have lived there...

In conclusion, it's no secret that change always takes time, sacrifice and patience. It's unlike a car wash or a laundromat, where one brings all the dirt and filth and comes out squeaky clean. No, as said public speaker Gordon Graham, "The challenge of change centers around taking a concept or technique and implementing it ... and staying with it until it becomes integrated ... it takes commitment and follow through." It's foolish and unreasonable to start over each time a new administration is in office or each time the government changes hands among the political parties or when special interests (which play a big part in today's politics) are threatened.

It's also needful to remember that though our desire is to look optimistically at all aspects of this problem, the reality is that not every youth will change, not everyone will get involved, not every gaping hole will be plugged up if and when the effort to improve the juvy system is undertaken. Yet, even if some youths will be salvaged out of today's wreck, even if one community will be changed, even if some lives are diverted away from the path of destruction, then we may boldly say that our efforts are worthwhile and successful. The answers are there. The desire is there. The material funds are available. But what's truly needed are not words, rhetoric and good intentions, but actual deeds. Words alone will not make it happen, and the worst possible thing that we may do is simply do nothing and pretend as though the dilemma of our troubled youth will simply go away on its own, or be locked up in a box like some troll and forgotten about. No, the stakes are much too high for neglect...

some youths will be salvaged out of today's wreck

Marcus Montgomery aka Socratise The Scholar Pelican Bay State Prison

A Child's Demise

If we take a look back on history in America we see how our perception of children and adolescence have changed dramatically and not for the better.

A child has a natural inquisitive nature that if not satisfied can lead to problems later in life that are manifested through their teenage lives, which the system of these times classifies as delinquency. But are we really taking the time to get to know our children? Does a young child steal candy just to steal candy, or is the reason that maybe his parents/guardian can't afford to buy the items that the child so desires ever come into play? No, we just see him as a young thief.

What about a child that goes into a store and shoplifts clothing merchandise, do we write him off automatically as marked shoplifters? Does it ever occur that maybe the merchandise that they've shoplifted was so desired and needed by that child that they had to take it? Do we ever consider the psychological ramifications of so-called juvenile delinquency? Do we consider that maybe the clothes were in style and everybody but that child was wearing them, and because his/her parents couldn't afford them, the only way to curb laughter and criticism from peers was to go and steal them so that he/she could save face with the crowd and put his/her own psyche at rest – that now they can fit in as one of the crowd.

We don't see things like this because children don't express themselves in such a way that we would know their in distress, or they do express their emotions, but we're too blind and jaded to see that our children are crying out to us in as many ways as they know how.

So, instead of receiving the help and counseling that they need from their parents, in comes the Juvenile Justice System. In comes Juvenile Hall, boot camps, reform schools, group homes, junior penitentiaries known as the CYA (California Youth Authority).

Once they leave out the door and enter the correctional system, our children have left our hands right? Wrong!! The worst mistake society can make today is to think we have no power and influence over how our children are treated and counseled inside of these facilities.

What do I think needs to be done to improve the Juvenile Justice System? The first step to improving the system starts with us. We make the system. We pay for the services they are supposed to provide. We have a say so, whether we think so or not.

Let's start with my first factor, keeping our children out of the system by talking to them, getting to know them, nurturing them, and setting the right examples for them, and maybe the population of the Juvenile Justice System will be decreased.

Secondly, we must use our power to change the system for the betterment of not just our child, but all children within the system.

I will use the "Three Strikes and Your Out" Bill, as an prime example of the power we as a society possess. Bills, such as this, go up to legislature, and to get passed as law, people like us have to vote them in or vote them out, yet we fail to make that critical decision because we feel that it won't effect out children and out lives. But sadly we're wrong.

Take me for example. I committed a crime when I was seventeen and I was given a Juvenile Fitness Hearing which I failed, because the judge felt I was not fit to be sent to CYA, I wasn't fit for another chance as a juvenile in his eyes, though my juvenile history shows not one serious infraction, and now I'm doomed to spend 25 years to life in the penitentiary. Is that justice? I have my own opinion, but what's yours?

You see, if I had the chance I would be the spokesman for all who have been done an injustice by the system, because I care not what they (the system) think about my opinion, I only care about what the people think, and how they channel their thought for the benefit of all.

To better this system put yourself in the shoes of a juvenile detainee. See the inside of a cell that is the same size as a bathroom, go through the daily regime of breakfast, school, recreation, dinner, and once again back to the cell. Put yourself in their bodies and receive the scorn from day to day from the so-called counselors that are supposed to be there to help, but only care about eight hours, a paycheck, and chinese take-out. Why do you call someone a counselor if the only counsel you ever receive is to pull your pants back up and tuck your shirt in, or to shut up while in line.

Why are you only seen by a counselor of the administrative level when you become a disturbance?

Why doesn't every child that comes through the door of the Halls have access to a psychologist unless they are on behavioral suppressant medication?

Is this really what Juvenile Justice is all about, or is this what we have let the system become? The Juvenile Justice Department has

become a hybrid of part what it should be and part I don't give a damn. It's become a demon that is in control over our children. We must change this! We must fight what seems undefeatable.

Not even the Wall of Berlin could withstand the outcry of the people. We must go to the city council meetings and speak our ideas, get them on the record and if they don't listen, get a lawyer and make sure you are heard, because you do have a right to be heard.

I will close with my philosophy on the ways this system has mis-educated us and the obstacle that we must overcome to make a better way for our children.

All politics are merely is a means to an end. The means being knowledge and the end being control. The end always justifies the means. Beyond that statement remains only one issue: who will be the beneficiary? We all know that the county benefits from the occupancy of each detainee, but the amount they get for each detainee I do not know. The same fact applies to group placement homes. It is my belief that because of this knowledge, the system must establish an economy which is totally predictable and manipulatable. What better scapegoats to use than delinquent children. In order to achieve their feat, the low-class elements of our society must be brought under total control, in that, we must believe that our children are getting the best help they can get from the system, and the system feeds society the disinformation that they believe will keep concerned citizens happy and content so that they can go without interruption in their plan to go get as many heads inside an institution as they can, so that they can profit economically. I've said it time and time again, this is non-other than modern day slavery.

The sad part is we don't even question the propriety of the matter. And in order to achieve such conformity, the lower class family must be disintegrated by a process of increased preoccupation of the parents and the establishment of government-operated baby sitters (juvenile detention facilities) for the occupationally orphaned children.

If you tell someone that they are inferior for such a long period of time, they will come to believe it, if there is no one among them to tell them otherwise. Well I am here to say that we are not inferior, and we do have a voice and we must use our voices to express the concerns of the voices that are too low to be heard. Our children.

In a constant struggle

My Story

My real name is Marcus Montgomey and I am 21 years of age. I am currently in Pelican Bay State Prison for an accident that took place during a crime.

I was arrested when I was seventeen and taken to Alameda County Juvenile Hall where upon finding that I was not fit for the Juvenile Justice System. I was tried as an adult on two special circumstances of first degree murder and was sentenced to 25 years to life.

The reason I can definitely identify with this topic of juvenile justice is because even while detained in Juvenile Hall I was always trying to make things better for myself and those around me. I was always speaking for the living conditions and rights of inmates and I still continue to do so here in the CDC.

When I was at Camp Sweeney on a 6-9 month program I served as stand-in student council president and was elected as vice president for the next term in the early months of 1999.

I also served on the Digital High School (DHS) committee with several Alameda County Office Of Education teachers and administrative members, to possibly increase the knowledge and use of computers and electronics for detainees in Juvenile Hall, and although I unfortunately had to later witness the progress from inside the walls of the Hall, I must say that some of the issues we discussed were brought to light and now it is possible for inmates in maximum security units to have access to up to date computer technology.

Those detainees in Juvenile Hall that are grateful for the use of the computers should thank Mrs. Martin a teacher at the Camp. Mrs. Johnson who was a friend of mine and principal of the Chabot Community Day Center, and many others, for making that goal of high technological resources available.

And yes, we need so much more. I urge all youth in the system from all the counties to take a stand and speak out for what you need, get your parents involve and yes the wheels of the system moving for you, because not only are they set in place for your custody and control, but for your care. Thank you for listening.

I will stay in the struggle because the struggle will stay with me.

Big Mainee Santa Clara County Jail

How can you put a youngster back into the same school, the same neighborhood, the same enviroment

How To Improve Juvenile Justice System

I truly believe that beneficial prgrams would definitely ameliorate the Juvenile Justice System. Being that I haven't been incarcerated in any other juvenile facility out of San Jose, therefore I can only speak on Santa Clara County Juvenile Hall.

Being that San Jose is one of the top wealthiest cities in the nation, (if not the wealthiest overall), I find it ironic that there isn't a lot of money thrown into our Juvenile Hall for plenty of beneficial programs.

I don't believe in incarceration or better yet, keeping a human being inside of a cage. That is blatantly inhumane, no matter what the crime! Instead of incarceration, I believe in help, alternative programs. From what I've seen, nine times out of ten, an individual who is incarcerated on a consistent basis is just like me, meaning that they were robbed of their innocence at a very young age, perpetually traumatized, inclined to do way too much for acceptance and reassurance, hopeless.

From February 19th 2000 until June 24th of 2002 I was in Juvenile Hall. I just transferred to County Jail on June 24th. So as you can see, I ws in a cage inside Juvenile Hall for over two years.

That whole time I was in a cage, young men were coming back, after just being released a few months before. That's most likely because those individuals were released back into society with the same mindset and no goals. To make matters worse, they are released back into the same enviroment that turned them out in the first place!

But, what if they were offered beneficial programs while they were locked up in the first time? Would it have made a difference? I believe so. Being that my generation is the so-called "future," yes, I believe it was worth a shot.

In this particular Hall, the only programs offered are bascially drug programs. In my opinion, all knowledge is valuable, so I'm not knocking the drug programs, but not all of the minors are addicted to drugs. Not all of us need that program. All it takes is common sense to know that drugs are considered illegal, they aren't healthy and so forth. So unless a person is retarded, they already know the ramifications that involve drugs. Most of the people who go to the drug programs anyway, do it just to get out of their cage. I know that I did.

With all of the money this city is supposed to have, why not spend a small portion of it on sports programs, a huge library, cooking classes, programs that teach you how create and run a business. The list goes on and on. Basically, turn Juvenile Hall into a miniature college. That's what juveniles in that type of situation need.

What's the point of being caged up? You can't possibly believe that putting somebody inside of a cage will somehow rehabilitate them. That's preposterous, putting a human inside of a cage is psychological torture and punishment. I don't see the logic to keeping a person in a cage, letting them out for a few hours to enjoy insignificant playtime, deceiving reality, that's exaclty what it is people! Trip on that! Life isn't all about playing dominoes, ping pong, handball and video games.

No, life is about finding yourself a great paying job that has great benefits, saving your money, so you can have your

own home, have your own car, learning how to wash your clothes properly and be able to cook for yourself, learning about nutrition and proper exercise so you can maintain good health, traveling the world, instad of just seeing your city day after day, getting married and having children, being financially stable, being open-minded, and overall being happy. That's what life is about. That's what the Juvenile Justice System should be providing. Not only inside of the facility, but outside too.

How can you put a youngster back into the same school, the same neighborhood, the same enviroment, and yet expect them to function. For example, my grandparents have this dog that they keep in a little section of their backyard. That dog is a straight psycho. That's because that dog isn't treated right. It's been ten years, and not once have I seen my grandparents walk, play, or show some type of affection to that dog. Real talk. Once or twice, I have seen them let the dog run out in the front yard.

Now tell m what do you think happens when that dog if let out of it's little section? A straight psychopath! Uncivilized to the fullest. That animal has no knowledge. Day in and day out, that dog walks back and forth, (15 feet at the most), eats her dogfood, sleeps, and howls, I wouldn't be surprised if you told that dog to sit and she jumped at you instead. So now, when that dog is let back into her little section of the backyard, she's normal again. Wouldn't the same thing happen to a juvenile?

Peer pressure and the lack of discipline don't mix. A lot of juveniles come to the Hall and only stay there for a few weeks or a few months. Good behavior will usually get you sent to a honors unit sort of. In the honor's unit, you are in a dorm, not a cage, you get to go out into the outside world. I even believe you can go to school and have a job, but at the end of the nitght you have to be back in the Hall. Now that's a great program. But, if you are in an maximum security unit, for a real reason to be in a maximum security unit, you'll be lucky if you walk outside your unit.

The individuals in maximum security are the ones who need these programs, because these individuals are usually locked up for a very long time. I have this one homie who was in there from time he was 15 years old. He didn't get released until four months before his 20th birthday. And no, he didn't get released home, he was released to YA for another four years! I can name plenty of individuals who were and still are in maximum security for more than a year. That's a plenty of time to learn the lessons that these programs I've mentioned have to offer. Instead of spending superfluous time confined in a cage, that time could be spent on these prgrams.

But what happens when it's time for a juvenile to be released back into society? If that individual isn't gang related, then they'll have a better chance at succeeding, even if they do live in the same neighborhood. But for an individual who is affiliated trying to function properly in that same neighborhood won't happen. What happens if that individual has no other family to live with? So the system could at least provide a college dorm like setting, just until that juvenile can stand on his or her own two feet.

Now maybe that's asking for too much, I don't know. But it's definitely worth a try.

**With all of the money this city is supposed to have,
why not spend a small portion of it on sports programs, a huge
library, cooking classes, programs that teach you**

All By Design?

Having spent the last twenty two years incarcerated, which began when I was a sixteen-year-old kid, unaware of the pitfalls and dangers of a system that preys upon unsuspecting youth who are for the most part troubled, lost and trying to find a means by which to assert a definition to their own existence, but who are up against a stark cold reality.

This is no way an attempt to make excuses for bad choices that kids, in their quest to develop according to certain influences, make. The point is, if it wasn't me sitting here explaining my experiences to you, somebody else's unsuspecting kid would be, because that's the nature of the type of society we live in... one that pretends for the sake of world politics that it cherishes and expounds the welfare of its youth when in reality this is a racist and totalitarian society almost openly fascist!

We can close our eyes and pretend that we are one nation under God with liberty and justice for all. However, friends, the nature of capitalism is inherently racist and feeds and fuels itself off of the extorted labor of others, usually the poor and undeveloped. The Juvenile Justice System is but one institution in a maze of criminal justice institutions designed to fuel a "political economy" referred to as the "prison industrial complex," or, put another way, modern day slavery (lest we forget that this society and its core values rose to its present level of greatness as a result of two hundred fifty plus years of chattel slavery).

Quoting Manning Marable:

Slavery and colonialism created the material conditions which forced an oppressed people to leave the surroundings of their previous history. That is, the external constraints demanded by coerced labor and a rigid caste / social hierarchy redirect forces of a people's history. The slave could not live for himself or herself at any particular process. The slave was / is viewed by the master as a cog in the accumulation of capital.

The richest one percent is known as the ruling class. Their institutions - e.g. federal, state and local governments - dictate every aspect of life. The common folk are subjected to colonialism, robbing the individual of his / her cultural identity, which of course makes one susceptible to the real dangers of the ruling classes plans or the culture of destruction.

Many of the youngsters that are caught up in these places undoubtedly started at an early age, perhaps with the school nurse or principal having the youngster placed on some sort of mind-altering drug like Ritalin or something the government says has proven effective because the kid is hyper. Thus stifling the child's normal cycle of development and directing them towards a path of irrational behavior that will eventually lead to some form of institutionalization.

Here is where we must realize that under capitalism, the poor and disenfranchised are always at risk because it's the nature of the system. A child is born knowing nothing and what it learns comes from those things that it has direct contact with, so I believe there are no bad kids, just bad influences, but bad influences by design. Whose design?

Sure, we must take responsibility for our own actions, and I think we begin to do that when we begin the journey of re-discovering who we are individually and the innate qualities that were put to rest by the "culture of destruction." We begin to do that by recognizing the innate human being with certain historical obligations and a genuine recognition and atonement for the senseless wrongs we have been involved in.

So when you realize that you've been out your mind, you will begin to understand some of the operational mechanisms of the capitalist system. I'm not here advocating socialism, communism or any other -ism. I'm simply stating that under this system in its present form, a certain percentage of people, young / old, Black, White or Brown, are cogs and by design will be funneled through the various institutions whether it be Juvenile Justice or the Department of Corrections. The nature of this system is inherently evil with the bottom line being profit, super profits at the expense of human lives.

Manning points out:

American capitalism is preserved by two essential and integral factors; fraud and force. Fraud is the ideological and cultural hegemony of the capitalist creed, that enterprise is free and competition exists for all in the marketplace, that success is available for all who work hard, accumulate capital and participate as voters in the electoral process, that democratic government is dependant upon freedom to own private property. Blacks, Latinos and White workers are barraged daily with illusions about the inherent justice and equal opportunity within the American system. Educational institutions, churches, media and popular culture all in their own way participate in creating

Randall Ellis Corcoran State Prison

the logical framework for a system that remains irrational and inhumane.

Not trying to get away from the question, but it's worth noting that in this country, unlike anywhere else in the civilized world, children / kids are treated as adults, abused and victimized by an overtly discriminatory system of justice.

It has been my experience with the Juvenile Justice System that it's a system that is coldly indifferent to the welfare of children. But it castigates and ridicules countries like Cuba who, despite all its US imposed hardships, places the welfare of its children first. Cuba has long since recognized that its children are its future, unlike here in the USA where one is fed a steady dose of propaganda, where it seems that its children are its burden and are constantly abused and victimized, tried as adults and fitted for long stints in adult prisons. What purpose is it serving sentencing a kid to two hundred, three hundred or even four hundred years in prison? What message is being sent to that kid? What he or she is being told is they have no redeemable qualities and should therefore never be in society again. Was it all by design? But whose design?

I still maintain there are no bad kids, just bad influences. For example, who created the images of Al Capone and glorified the mafia, Bonnie and Clyde and the gangster lifestyle? So when those most at risk and susceptible to these Hollywood / government influences run around calling themselves Capone, Gotti or Devil, who's gonna take the blame? Why would a society claiming to be the most civilized, the best and the freest bombard its youth with such destructive images and accuse other countries who try to block such images from entering their countries as being dictators and tyrants? The shoe doesn't fit. The "prison industrial complex" exists and is fueled by an essential element of capitalism - fascism.

Again, Manning provides insight:

Fascism is a deformity of capitalism. It heightens the imperialist tendency towards domination which is inherent in capitalism, and it safeguards the principle of private property. At the same time fascism immeasurably strengthens the institutional racism already bred by capitalism.

In my opinion, asking what could be done to improve an already inhumane and predatory system is like putting a band-aid on a wound that requires stitches. I submit as Marable so prophetically

Dear Beat Within

My name is Randall Ellis. I'm thirty-seven years old and I was born right here in California. I've been in prison since the age of sixteen for aiding and abetting murder and robbery. I was tried as an adult and basically railroaded off to prison the way so many others are. I was sentenced to twenty-five years to life; nobody bothered to do what's right or what's fair according to the circumstances. There was a skillful manipulation of the law by those sworn to uphold it.

However, I was struck by your question. Having been a juvenile myself and treated as an adult, my experience has been somewhat barbaric to say the least. Sometimes I wonder if my file has a special number on it signaling me out for this type of treatment, but then I just look around and see all the other victims.

Today I'm writing from Corcoran SHU having spent the last eighteen-and-a-half years in Security Housing Units (SHU). I'm told that I remain a threat to the safety of others based on information provided by confidential informants. All the challenges to a policy that confines one to SHU indefinitely have met with resistance by the courts. So we really are "without justice."

My advice to young people today would be to be informed. Read. Don't just settle for the romance novels they pass out on the carts here. Insist on learning about yourself, your history and culture.

My advice to young people of today is be informed and don't be scared into silence by tyranny! Because today it's me, but tomorrow it could be you, and if you don't speak up now, who's gonna speak up when they come for you?

the beat without

Face

Central Detention Center, San Bernadino, CA

My Background

A quick background will pull you up to the present in my travels through the system, as well as hit on the subject on what I feel should be done to improve the Juvenile Justice System.

I am 31 years old and have been in and out of the system since 1984. That's 18 years. I was in and out of the Halls and Camps out in Orange County and the Los Angeles area 22 times before I was sent to CYA.

Every unit in Orange County Juvenile Hall I've been in, and during my time had the longest stayed ever in the Hall, 16 months straight. I'm sure that record has been beat by now.

CYA's; SRCC, Preston, mostly Tamrack Lodge (the hole), then off to YTS (Youth Training School) units AB, WX, ST, AND OR, the Rock we used to call it, also that's the hole there.

I share these places and units so the readers who have been, or have heard of these places, or may be sitting there right now, know what and where I've been. I do not want to be took for some jive ass just running his mouth.

I left the Halls and camps to go to CYA in 1987 and left CYA to go to state prison in 1991. As far as my history in state prisons, the list is very long. Most of my time is served in Ad-Segs and Corcoran SHU and Tehachapi SHU. The last time I went to the hole, back in '96, I have yet to come out and never will again. I am a prison gang member as well.

Readers! Do not misunderstand this back history as glorification of any kind, this is a pitiful life, miserable and self destructive.

For the youngsters doing time and getting the ride on their whoo-bang, or whatever new wave name they are using nowadays, I can honestly say, I feel you, been there and loved it. I know the feelings, thoughts and fears before the riot. The night before you move on some dude, and I know the feeling of pride you get from the homies when it's all said and done. I know all that.

Know what else I know? I know the messed up feeling when you're writing home telling your family it's gonna be a lil' while longer before you come home. I know that feeling when you're talking to your mother on the phone and they're crying asking you why you can't stay out of trouble and just come home!

I also know that feeling that no one cares 85% of the time about my past eighteen years. I have been on the inside getting my ride on, having that name, whether it be good or bad, always having someone saying your name. I know that!

For being inside the jailhouses, prisons, etc., etc. I've made it, lived at the top of the game in here, have hurt and stepped on a lot of people to get there. All that riding, fighting, rioting, stabbings, now I think for what? For my name? I could have had that anyways. What, for my cell that I live in? I could have had it anyways. What, for my homies? Count how many times you've made it to canteen because a homie sent you a postal money order, count how many collect calls you've made to a homies' pad, count how many packages and letters you've gotten from the homies. Now add all that together and ask yourself, did you even need the homies?

Granted it's pleasant to have a person to do time with, but do not compromise yourself or your freedom for anyone. I say this for the programmers in jail, but stress it for all those that are getting their ride on in here because our time is harder and more lonesome at the end. Whatever, just know no matter how many riots, fights, or stabbings, nothing will change. The other person will still be where they're from, and you all will still be in jail doing longer and longer. Quit fighting over cell space. Then maybe years to come you won't be writing a letter like this.

I've been with the big homies, OG's from all corners of California and it's the same old story. Life is on the streets with your families and kids.

I know 9 out of 10 of us growing up went through and had to endure hardships of one sort or another and its downfalls, but the bottom line is, before we do that crime, there's that knowledge that we could go to jail and it's not right. So no matter what hardship anyone has suffered, we still know right from wrong, nothing can take that from us. You as individuals have to understand this because you and only you can make the difference in your life.

Looking back now with a lot of self-evaluation after some hard time, I see all this. And all the men and women doing hard time everywhere will tell you the same. I personally blamed everyone and everything for all the wrong that came into my life and I did so for years. Just recently I've realized that I did myself more harm than anyone or anything.

The system is to house prisoners, nothing more. The justice system is a billion dollar industry in this country and we are the people that keep the money flowing. Realistically, why would the system want to lose a billion dollar industry? Right, they wouldn't, so actual rehabilitation is not too high on the system's to-do list.

All the time I did in the Juvenile Hall and CYA's there was never really any type of trying to have us kids rehabilitate ourselves. Going to jail is supposed to be like a punishment to us and in truth it could have been just the opposite. Some kids could be doing worse on the outside than on the inside of the system. And it should be for the system to look into why, and help the kids work around the bad situations they may have been struggling with. Oh sure the system will say there are too many to deal with individually,

and they are correct in that aspect. But the system classifies kids in groups for housing situations and so they could classify groups of kids to also deal with their outside situations, whatever their cases may be. I mean come on, there's not hundreds of different situations that bring kids to jail, just hundreds of kids dealing with the same couple of situations that brought them to jail.

Juvenile Hall and camp is real easy, all choices are made for the kids which makes us lazy and expectant once we are out again! Ultimately the Halls and Camps are just breeding grounds for future robbers, racists, murderers, and gang members, warehousing the system's future. All I've really seen is money being spent to construct more bed space to house more prisoners, little on rehabilitation. The system needs to make it more self sufficient for the kids. Bottom line, if you do not work for what you want in life you will not get it, nothing's for free in the free world.

Another problem is all you need to work in the system is a high school diploma. The system hires babysitters for good money and full benefits and most haven't got a clue what kids have come from and what they are dealing with. More money should be spend on staff that know more about who they are dealing with and how to help deal them opposed to just turning keys, pushing buttons and breaking up fights. More needs to be done for outside rehabilitation, helping the kids make the transition back to the streets. I mean think about it, take a kid put him in a jail cell somewhere for his sentence then throw him back on the streets that's today's rehabilitation. When I used to get released from the Halls the staff would say, "See you next week," and most of the time they were right.

Pretty much guys, the holding pens are far and plenty, now the system needs to concentrate on outlets on the streets for kids. Take that next couple of million they'll get to build another institution and put it towards some outside resources for the kids. Over time as a person goes through the system more and more options of any kind of rehabilitation become nil. Once you are released from state prison they give you \$200.00 and you're on your own. Not much to start a life with. The system could say it's not their responsibility to help start a life for an adult when they get out, but it's all part of rehabilitation funds they get every year. But if the time, money, and effort are used wisely with the youngsters doing time now, perhaps they will not become repeat offenders and be raised up in the system. Truthfully I could go on and on but I'll save some for later.

Now, I have five prison terms under my belt, and on this last trip so far I've been down since May of '98. I started out with three years then while inside I picked up a new case of attempted murder on another inmate and received seven years. Last year the federal government pulled me from state prison and has filed several gang related charges on me and I could end up with 20 more years.

In a nutshell guys and gals, before it's too late for you, seriously think before you act.

In closing I've also enclosed what I call the answer. Thanks for your time and take care.

The Answer

I try to imagine what life may be like in the free world. The people, the cities, the colors, the laughter. The intimacy of a woman. What it must feel like to be around people who mean you well, as opposed to never letting your guard down in an environment where compassion is a disease that can kill you. What it must feel like to be able to release the good in you and not to be judged weak.

Every man in prison bottles his humanity and keeps it hidden. In an environment that is harsh and unforgiving, humanity is a lamb in a lion's den. Humanity is humble and lacks aggressiveness. Men who are not aggressive verbally and physically in here are considered passive, weak and are ultimately tested. Humanity is meek and unassuming. In here you cannot afford to be meek. In prison the meek do not inherit shhhh. You must force men to assume and recognize that many moves against you will bring about severe consequences. Each day you are pulled between your innate desire to exhibit kindness and compassion, and your reality that would be prelude to trouble.

In 18 years of in and out of prison mostly, the world has changed on the outside, yet inside, prison remains the same. It's as though time is suspended and only the characters change. Each incident is similar to one in the past. The outcome never differs by much. The script was long ago written by the men who came first.

Prison is a sordid script, written by sadists whose acts are not for the faint of heart, acts that have reactions that end in cruelty, suffering and death.

Each man in prison holds onto a glimmer of what life can mean. We view life through contact with friends and family in the free world. This is more important than anyone outside can imagine. It stops most men from falling into the abyss where society becomes a distant memory and their reality hinges on who they are in prison and how they live up to convict codes. Contact with people in society is the deprogrammer. No contact means you are caught, alone, you live and breathe your surroundings for years, till it becomes the norm and eventually you succumb, you resign yourself to the blackness...

Breakthrough

What do you think needs to be done to improve the whole Juvenile justice system?

To begin my answer to this thought provoking question, please allow me to lay the foundation to my hypothesis or opinion. For the individual who wants to change, I believe the concepts which I provide, will pave the way leading to a new found productive lifestyle.

I firmly believe that being educated with the tools to "breakthrough," while incarcerated as a juvenile would broaden horizons, allowing "choice" to be factored into an adolescents life.

Begin Today As A New Day:

Growing up in Juvenile Hall my peer and I were so focused on the past, that it blinded us to our futures. For example, grasping on to "where we were from," and not "where we were going." If we were able to come to the realization that our life could start over today. It would be like getting slapped in the face by a cashmere glove. Opening our minds to the future, releasing our grasps on the past.

Refusing To Blame Others:

Everybody's life is different, although some may be similar. Personal experiences change the way one person may perceive something from another.

As in, the baby born with a silver spoon, to the baby born to a dope fiends spoon. In both worlds each life has it's difficulties, but doesn't every life?

If the counselors of the Juvenile Halls could open up there eyes and look upon all adolescents with "potential," no matter what their upbringing is, while planting the seed of "integrity," we could learn to focus on the three most important people who need to change in our lives, me, myself, and I.

Examine Our Lives:

It takes a Juvenile Counselor who for more than just their pay check to sit down and listen. Giving the individual a "personal identification." Letting him or her know they are not just another face in the crowd. If we could learn to look deep down beneath the surface of our feelings, all the way to the core, we could start dealing with the issues that have left permanent scars on our lives. For example, dealing with the "hurt," before it turns into "anger," thus leading to a life sentence.

Ask For Help:

Pride is not the only character trait that enables someone to reach out in need, although it is one. Growing up a lot of us had no one to "ask for help." If we were taught that "no question, is a dumb question," and taken seriously, maybe we could get off to a better start on our futures, instead of "always," having to learn by our mistakes.

Keep Away From Temptation:

Some of us when released from Juvenile Hall we go straight back to the same environment without a choice in the matter, "That's where we live."

We need to make preparations to establish a "routine," to guide us in the direction of our goals. Maybe be given the opportunity to build a bond with a mentor prior to our release. Preparing an outline of ways to stay busy in a positive manner. Once again giving us a choice to sway from the path of re-offending, also known as the "revolving door."

Think Before We Act:

Being able to grasp the concepts of "cause and effect," is a characteristic worth admiring. If we were taught to use

Eric Stipe Corcoran State Prison, SHU

tactics such as mentally weighing our "pros and cons," before lives many situations. The outcome of our decisions would change drastically.

Heed Good Advice:

First and foremost to accomplish this, we need to have a role model to provide us with the words. Whether it comes from guest speakers, or a counselor who goes the extra mile to get involved.

Being taught to "listen," and not just hear others is the key to understanding the depth of good advice.

Respect Ourselves:

How can someone respect others, if they don't respect themselves? If we were given the opportunity to participate in group activities to condition our bodies, such as sports, exercise, teamwork, etc., our respect would grow simultaneously with our health.

Learning to communicate and also preparing the physical anguish, that many put their bodies through prior to their incarceration at Juvenile Hall.

Organize Priorities:

As growth and mentality change through maturity, so do priorities. To succeed in life, we must have and be taught to arrange these in our best interest.

Prior to an adolescents release from his or her, "Juvenile Hall experience," re-organization will lead to success, as long as the individual does not lie to themselves during the process. A counselor could help by listening to these and offering their experiences or opinions on how their priorities work for them.

Understanding Ourselves:

Being able to recognize and identify feelings are important. We must be taught to "self-reflect," learning about our wants and needs. Focusing on what our expectations are and must be, how we can meet them, live by them, and excel in our lives.

Goals Our Essential:

Short-term and long-term goals are essential. Whether they are, "I won't pick up that drug today." "I will earn my high school diploma." We must be taught that we must always have something to strive for, set our sights on and achieve. We must comprehend that we can accomplish anything we put our minds too.

Have Fun:

The world is a lot bigger than our communities. We need to experience some of what it has to offer. Recreational activities and hobbies come in a wide range; from restoring an old "bomb," to sky diving. There is something out there for everyone.

In Conclusion

As you can see throughout my opinion, I use the words "we," "us," and "our." The reason being is this. Just like the adolescents in the Juvenile Halls, there are men in the prison system who needs to grasp and use these tools to better themselves. I firmly believe that if the seed of this concept was planted in the adolescents life during his or her incarceration it would turn "doing time" into a learning experience, providing the stepping stone into a future of "integrity," "prosperity," and "accomplished desires."

Shawmba Jones

Sussex Correctional Institution, Georgetown, Delaware

To improve the System

My name is Shawmba N. Jones. I'm 27 years old of age and I am presently incarcerated within the great steel gates of Sussex Correctional Institute. I've been in the juvenile system, through various group homes, foster families, George Jr. Republic in Pennsylvania, Sleighton Farms (around the corner from Glen Mills), Camelot (Wilm., Del.) Stevenson House (Milford, Del.) Ferris School (Wilm Del.) then eventually the inner self outdoor program Vision Quest in Franklin / Exton, Pa.

In all these places the abuse I went through at home went left untreated, the mental health issues, the issues of neglect and abandonment. The social fabric we are all bad up of was torn and left unfixed, and subconsciously more than consciously I rebelled, broke laws, tried drugs and gave up—all the things I felt on one level or another at some point or another in my life as I was raised in Seaford, Delaware.

The way I see it is this, the "American Just Us System" is designed to re integrate the same slavery it abolished with the 13th Amendment.

The only way to legally, (as the law puts it), become an "Indentured Slave" again, to change the criminal justice system for juveniles will take truly dedicated individuals and political pull with an open mind to bring forth a different way other than prison. To hire people not just with book knowledge, but grass root level

understanding, people who've been where these kids are to help them see, and also understand where they've been and can end up. Only time, patience, willingness, drive, humbleness, optimism, understanding, commitment, and respect for what needs to be done to make "people in high places" realize that what they are teaching kids by locking them away without proper counseling and psychiatric help. That what they do is train them, evolve them from one way criminal to the next. Training school to prison, like telling a child it's not okay to hit others, but letting them watch boxing 10 minutes later...

Children today need to be shown the difference, talked to. To lock them away (is to some) just as the same as an ass whooping!

It all begins at home with the parenting of a child. Alternatives to incarceration and institutionalization first. Economic status will always play a part in the social fabric we all ultimately decide where we stand - internally - in our mind - if we aren't taught, "educated," that we can evolve and overcome with "patience and tolerance," and begin to "accept" our part as parents, nothing will ever change the criminal justice system. It begins at home before it reaches the court system. It begins inside our children's "minds" the root issue, before it is manifested into a negative behavior of anti-social proportions that will eventually lead to incarceration because of law breaking if left unacknowledged and repressed and left to fester. It starts from within... From within...

**Sometimes I wish my life could have taken
a different route. I guess everything is
meant for a reason,
a reason we sometimes will not understand**

E-Money

Pleasant Valley State Prison in Coalinga, CA

The Prison Lifestyle

Waking up in a cell surrounded by four walls, with the sounds of toilets flushing and squeaking sinks running immediately reminds me it's going to be another day of struggle in this prison madness.

I then hop off my bunk and spit that "ugh" . . . feeling out of my mouth, mad at the world for labeling me a menace, and placing me in such a fucked up predicament. I know I am to be blamed according to our so-called justice system, but is it alright if I ask, "Who are men to judge?"

Slipping on my prison blues makes me wonder what the hell I'd got myself in to. I know doing bad is wrong, but do placing a man in a 8 x 10 cell make it any better? They say there are two brighter days to come for every bad day. But, at times it seems as if it's the other way around. Sometimes I really wonder is there a God when I look back at my past and the fake reality I'm stuck in today.

Walking to chow (chile) I can almost smell the powdered eggs and the burnt potatoes which await me. I have long ago come to realize the garbage we are issued is not for enjoyable satisfaction, but survival purposes only. So I go on swallowing instead of chewing and hope I don't regurgitate from the unidentified animal I just ate. This is all part of the punishment of doing time. It's just the cruel and harsh part the judge decided to leave out.

From there you are called to your assigned job, what I call the slave quarter. Making no-more than ten pennies an hour for a thirty dollar an hour job. These people have the nerve to say they

are not a part of this legalized slavery which is taking place right here in front of our very eyes? They fail to realize that one can't play blind to that in which he sees.

It seems as if though writing and sleeping is the only two resources of freedom in such a sick situation. Never did I know how precious freedom was until she left me by myself. Now I crave for her comfort and hope once re-united she can hold me tight and never let go. There is a saying that says, "One really never knows what he has until it's gone." I guess I'm not ashamed to say, "now I know the meaning of that saying."

Sometimes I wish my life could have taken a different route. I guess everything is meant for a reason, a reason we sometimes will not understand. Making mistakes is not what we should be blamed for, it's deciding not to learn from those mistakes that takes lives.

Everyday I set foot on this dangerous yard filled with nothing but mind games and "trickation." I silently ask the Lord to shelter my soul. I have more than once witnessed men get their valubale lives taken right here in front of my very eyes. I can't begin to imagine how these men must've felt to see their thick red blood flow through their hands wondering how their families are going to react to such tragic but sad news.

I heard of this man called "death." I just truly wonder if he heard of me?

This is my daily life in this hell hole (in Pleasant Valley State Prison in Coalinga California). It's crazy, but it's a reality. It's a cold world where the sun shines so bright. Lets just hope it keeps shining for us.

J Roc High Desert State Prison in Susanville, CA

Penitentiary Life

The ideology most people have of this pen is fictitious and far-fetched. One can only grasp the totality of it from first-hand experience. But some of the morbid tales are true and to the point. The gang-style rapes are just a scare tactic to put in sorry individuals' imaginations. Homosexuality does exist, as it does anywhere else, but it's a choice that convicts or inmates choose to indulge in. Don't just cast an assumption that only lifers indulge in it ('cause some lifers morals and values go against such activities), 'cause I've seen cats with dates as short as 2010 cell up wit' a punk.

Barbarism is a day-to-day thang, but don't think it happens to everybody and at the same time, ain't nobody exempt from it. Mostly sharks prey on the weak and wounded, but at times even rida's get rode on. Combative tactics are practiced and studied every day due to the fact that these modern day plantations are just a battle zone for slaves of different races. Survival of the fittest.

There is a very few people who function, exist, and stand alone. You are categorized and subjected to different things based on your affiliation with gangs or political cadres (movements) or racist sects. Even as non-affiliates, you hang with certain CARs (groups) such as the Bay Car (Oakland/Richmond/ San Francisco) or EPA Car just to give you an idea. As a collective you only mingle with your own race - in here segregation still exists and racism is a scar left on your mental.

I don't really agree with the racism 'cause in my mind, a White convict or Southerner is not my true enemy. We (all races) fail to understand that the struggle is not about race as much as about a class struggle - the downtrodden people in this country (not of this country), the outcasts of society voted out by the people in control (not the people). Judged not by our crime but our background, an error in judgement. The whole court system is a master of deception. They say "The People of The United States vs. John Doe," but it's not that way at all.

With this destructive thinkin' and backwards politics some of these convicts have, they will be forever doomed. It is hard to be enemies with people your are in such close contact with everyday. The true enemy are the ones opposing us and playin' basketball with football rules, going back and forth tellin' this race that the other race has it in for them, thus keepin' us at one another's throats. Their plan is as old as civilization: Divide and conquer, and it's still workin'. The blatant racism is practiced and put into effect inside of their penitentiaries, which is a reflection of our future society if no one takes a stand at changing this.

As a whole, the penal system has nothing to offer a person who is trying to better themselves! They cut rehabilitation and return thus to introducing cruel and unusual punishment and modern-day slavery. No type of college programs, physical fitness, or job preparation

classes - just a sixth grade education!

I can't speak for every pen, but this one (High Desert) is workin' on its own terms! If you are an African (any African descendent) or a Northerner, you have very little comin'. You are viewed as highly manipulative just because you are from the Bay Area, based on the fact that we pop some fluently and floss accurately. When somethin' goes down as far as race riots or attacks on COs, they say automatically that the shot call came out of The Bay. The Racism is in total persuasion of the program.

For instance, just last night there was so-called "high tension" between two races so they laid the day room down and found a knife. Now normally if two races collide, they lock down both races for a long period of time. They came off lockdown the next night. But the Africans collided with the Southerners and we been on lockdown since March and it is now September. I feel like there is a conspiracy against the African race! Maybe a few selective people got off on the true enemy (authority) due to disrespect that is shown and racism displayed to our people up here. This is a war-zone constantly with Africans winning the battles but losing the war.

During lockdown, out of 168 hours in a week, we only come out 30 minutes during the 168 hours to take showers - three days out of seven. You can't receive packages from your family, can't order your TV and radios or tapes and CDs, deprived of the canteen. And only served two semi-cold trays of food a day! The visitor is limited and your family has to see you unshackled and put in a small booth divided by thick Plexiglas. Can you imagine your child, mother, or nieces and nephews thoughts seeing you there goin' through this? Can you fathom the thought of your mother crying when she sees the scars left on your wrist from the cuffs being too tight? Can you learn to laugh to keep from crying? It's mental stress and depressing!

The pen ain't cool at all, so miss this if you can. But if you are one of the many juveniles that are victims of Proposition 21, it's too late to miss it! I can't run the prison politics in depth, but I can say get ready mentally. I say mental opposed to physical because all things is 90% mental and 10% physical. It's all a mental game and you gotta be strong-minded. It's good to be a rida, but it takes more than that at times! You ain't gotta walk on eggshells but you gotta try not to wreck, 'cause you not only thinkin' for yourself, but for your whole race, 'cause if you collide they collide wit' you.

So think before you make a move. Separate yourself from that juvenile mentality of tryin' to prove you hard and tough. I hope you don't have to get down, but if you do, strike with precision! Make it count or be a victim to your own attack! Things vary from yard to yard, but a three or four (level) yard ain't no joke, so dismiss the sugar-coated stories from your mind.

This is real. Stay strong and take heed. One luv.

During lockdown, out of 168 hours in a week, we only come out 30 minutes

Sammy Boy California Youth Authority

trouble with other wards and loving to bully was false. But that's what happens when you try to be the big dawg and earn stripes. It back fires into your face.

Since I was labeled everything above, they sent me to a dorm where I'm the third smallest cat out of eighty kids. But what they fail to realize is it's not the size that matters, but the heart.

To all the young comrades in the Hall, change your ways before it's too late. One love to everybody on lockdown. Keep your head up!

Much love to all the B5 (max unit) staff that made my life easier. Thanks to Ms. Aragon, T-Thomasson, Mr. Baldwin, Roby, and Mr. Guerrero. You guys kept me grounded during my stay and sorry for the ruckas on my last day.

One love to The Beat. Keep doing what you're doing.

Get Your Act Together

Man, soon as I came up here (CYA) they had me labeled, due to my past. Before I even stepped inside my dorm door the guard outside pulled me to the side and told me, "I understand that you are a trouble maker that loves to fight and start trouble with other wards." I looked at him like, "what are you talking about?" On the paper they gave to him there was all the stuff that I did in my past placements. Somethings were true, like fighting. But starting

Give them an education, a vocation, within an overall prison environment conducive to "rehabilitation," and it will greatly increase their chance to become a productive citizen

SunMansLight Salinas Valley State Prison

Perpetual Lock Down

Well, we were off lock down for about an hour before things went wrong again. I am beginning to seriously doubt anything will ever go right here.

There is a large population, a new generation of young, and very stupid kids who appear to be without the ability to reason. Couple that to the fact honor and conscience appear to be missing from their resume, and you may form some picture in your mind why the situation here is as it is.

Frankly, I am past complaining. I am only bringing you up to date. "Lock down" becomes old after a while. Over the past seven weeks, other than the "one hour," the only time I have been released from my cell is for a ten minute shower every third day.

It is frustrating. Most of the violence here is initiated by Mexican nationals, yet everyone is made to suffer the consequences. There was a time when whichever race was causing the problem were locked down. Now it is everyone.

The fact that everyone is "punished" creates hard feelings, and builds tension as we are denied exercise, library books, quarterly packages, fresh air, whatever we would otherwise be allowed. Does it not stand to reason there will be friction between those who are causing the problems, and those who are not?

At some point, those who were not the problem, would not have been a problem otherwise, become so because they are tired of the b.s....

Could this be why a "group punishment" rule has been silently enacted? Keep the inmates angry? After all, the longer we are locked down the sweeter the guards have it.

What causes much of the unrest — besides the warehouse prison environment and lack of programs — is that during long, stressful periods inside our cells, there will always be those who "lose it" for a moment, act out inappropriately, react to something otherwise minor and become disrespectful to others around them, whatever. When we come off lockdown, guess who is going to be involved in the very next incident? It is never ending.

Put stupid with dumber and you concoct an explosive mixture. Can it be what that is what's happening between these young punks, and the Administration- "dumb and dumber?" How about a very imaginative, and creative, unchecked power making life for its members as comfortable as possible?

I am not inclined to become intellectually "wordy" here. I am not really trying to form a detailed picture. If I really cared right now, I would. For now, it gives me something to write and share with you.

My dream fantasy is someday the prison administrators will begin to care, and take appropriate action to achieve a goal which will be of benefit to all people. It appears that it is kept very quiet that what happens to prisoners at the hands of their keepers has far-reaching consequences, positive and negative. The average citizens out there do not understand this. Until they do, they will not care.

I have no doubt said it before, and without doubt will say it again many times before I die... How an inmate is treated while in prison, what he learns or does not learn, will be reflected in his actions when he is released back into society. There is absolutely no middle ground on that. Brutalize him physically, emotionally, and psychologically, he or she will return that "favor" when "free" to do so.

Give them an education, a vocation, within an overall prison environment conducive to "rehabilitation," and it will greatly increase their chance to become a productive citizen once released, and greatly decrease the odds innocent people will be victimized by these prisoners when they are released.

Listen to any one try to argue against what I just shared with you, and you will be listening to a damn fool.

When I get up on my pulpit of indignation and righteousness, I realize I do so at the risk of exposing my true inaptness at articulation...(smile). I do know if these people ever place me into a situation where I am unable to write, I am in trouble. When I first came to prison, I went through that experience, and it was not pleasant.

Now, I do a lot of writing, articles, my book manuscripts, and I realize I risk having it taken from me as a result of my writing about issues my keepers would rather I did not.

To this point in time, I have received only a small amount of recognition by the media press. Therefore, I am not yet viewed as a threat to the unwanted reform of this conceptualized failure of a corrupt system known as the California Department of Corrections. I may never be so recognized, which will mean I have failed in what I am obsessed to do. "Failure" means I can keep my writing material, and not be buried deep inside a solitary confinement cell, but will that be enough compensation to offset my disappointment resulting from the fact that I failed? A real strange position to be in, huh?

It may end up that I will have to content myself with the knowledge that I gave it the best I am, and that one fails only when one stops trying. Who knows?

Dear Young Black Brotha

It's so preposterous that you have permitted yourself to be part of this neo-slavery that we now know is "The System." Over 300 years and yet this mental and physical entrapment still exists. No, it ain't slavery during the society of mass agriculture. But mentally, we are still picking cotton with bloody palms. Nightsticks replace the whips, thus the 12-gauge shotguns stay in use alongside the present's semi-automatics. They take you away from your family, your home, you means to survival and force you in the slave owner's house (jail). Their words are, "This is where you belong, N**ger!" That bad thing is, you can't get mad because you forced this upon yourself by doing what you were doing. Slangin' dope to your own kind. Slippin'... Slippin' and falling.

Your sweet little sister got a hold of what she thought was cream-colored candy. But it wasn't. It was your white man's poison. She chewed it up and her precious little heart exploded into blood particles and crack.

How do you justify such a thing, Brotha? Now, as the slave catchers (cops) tie those sharp ropes around your freshly scarred wrists, they're even more satisfied. One of them says, "Ooh, yeah, first we gon' beat him, then the judge gon' fry him." When you go to court, the judge is really loving you. He's thinking, "Yes, another black criminal. I'm helping decrease his race's population." He sentences you to be executed by lethal injection. Your momma is now hysterical. Not only has she lost her innocent young daughter because of your carelessness, but she's also going to lose you because of the same incident. Another Black Queen gone insane due to the realization of the system.

Suddenly, everything goes pale white. You're sweating and breathing hard. You wake up in Cell 6 at the San Francisco County Jail. A guard comes to your door and tells you to pack your things because you're getting released. You remember why you were there in the first place—shoplifting at a grocery store. You sigh deeply and thank god. Remembering the nightmare you just had, you decide to do right this time.

The decisions you make are the decisions that make you.

Professor Blackmind (Lawrence Smith) Pacific Boys Lodge Home and Sacramento Juvenile Hall

Poetic Justice In Progress (Chapter Two)

I

These staff are trying to keep me down
They love to see my face with frown
But I will wipe away my tear and keep my head up
They know that I will never give up

II

Just the other day I was punished for something I didn't do,
My peers knew I didn't do it and the staff did too
but I was punished because of their hostility towards me.
They want to see me live my life in misery

III

They will not make me weak, they will only make me stronger
Like food given to a homeless man who was dying of hunger
I know I can win this war with God's guidance
And there will be no need to resort to violence

IV

They get in the newspapers and say how much they help us
Bullshhh, they can't help us by hurting us
They bring more stress than we had at home
And they wonder why we do wrong

Poetic Justice Will Be Served

Black Dragon Pacific Lodge Boys Home

Unleashed

There has been an error in the system
The Black Dragon has been unleashed
The system will now be exposed
and no one can stop the fury
Not guards
Not the police
Not the POs
No one can stop me from bringin' the heat
Locked up in a bacteria infected cell
Thin blankets and cold feet
Stuffed with yeast to fill the belly
Guards slam you hard when there's a fight
They say it's to keep things under control
But they do it by giving you a broken arm and a fractured nose
They blind you with OC
and spit in your food
They let other inmates beat you up when no one's looking
They agitate you and keep you down all day
They call your PO
and tell him to recommend the CYA
They say, "You'll always mess up!"
They laugh when they see you crying
This is not fiction
or over exaggerated
This is the truth being exposed



**They will not make me weak,
they will only make me stronger**

The Poetic Prisoner Beat Within Staff / Former CYA Ward

YA Is No Mystery

"Have you ever been in the California Youth Authority? Can you describe the injustices that went on in there? Did you suffer any abuse? How long were you in there? Describe the cages. Explain the pain. Dig deep into your soul, muster up all those horrific experiences, and represent thousands of youth who were in a similar situation. Oh, by the way, what were you in there for?"

These are the words that spread through my ears like a disease as I sit down in an office chair comfortably while letting this stranger pry into my life for a story to fatten his pockets. A story I tell because there are thousands of people who can't tell their own story. A story I tell because I still foolishly believe that the termination of CYA might occur. A story that's told in spite of all the time and effort it took to suppress it. Yet and still I'm talking to one media person among many who view these experiences as just another story...

Over the past couple of weeks media people have bombarded me. It seems as though the California Youth Authority has become a hot topic all of a sudden. The New York Times, The Chronicle, The Examiner, KTVU, and CBS have interviewed me. I've spoken at the press conference of Jeff Adachi's call for a moratorium, which entails putting a stop to sending youth from San Francisco to YA. I gave my opinion in Sacramento at a Children of Incarcerated Parents hearing. And I've also been the image that gave Van Jones 'street credibility' on Court TV.

All of this because some genius finally figured out what's really going on in the Youth Authority. However, these things have been around since Y.A. was first built. It took two suicides in the same week for professionals to finally take a peek at the Youth Authority's faults. What they found were inhumane cages, unjust conditions, and an institutional conspiracy to punish and not rehabilitate. What were the professional researchers who give their lives to statistics doing when they saw CYA's recidivism rate at ninety percent? Did they conveniently overlook such a staggering number?

And even now that they're aware of what's going on, why aren't any youth that've experienced these hardships in the media? Why are our professional advocates constantly overshadowing our voices? These advocates only know what's going on through second hand experience -- through our experience. The majority of them have never even attempted to imagine being incarcerated, so how come they can list the possibilities of reforming YA with so much conviction? Why not take the time to be effective by asking us how the Youth Authority should be reformed. And when you do so, ask us with the intention of giving voice to our solutions to policy makers through the media. Listen to our stories and distribute them to the masses...

In 1997 I was arrested for a crime that I won't explain, because it seems as though the media wants to justify the inhumane conditions of YA by pointing to my crime. However, the issue is not what I did, but why the Youth

Authority perpetuates more victimization by offering no rehabilitation to youth with the intention of sending them right back into society. The crime I committed was bad enough, but it wasn't murder or rape. However, it was a crime, so the police arrested me and threw me into the maximum-security unit of San Francisco Juvenile Hall at sixteen years old. It was the first time I was ever locked up, so I wasn't suspicious when my public defender told me to plead guilty. After I pled guilty I was quickly sent to the Youth Authority in December of '97 -- three months after I was arrested.

While in YA I experienced and witnessed a plethora of injustices. The things I went through in there were horrific. When I first got there they told me I'd be doing three and a half years. However, three fights and smoking weed once nearly doubled my time, so I ended up doing six. In the beginning of those six years I was housed in O-H Close - an institution for the youngest youth in YA. They placed me in a gang called 'The Bay' which didn't even exist in the outside world. Plus, I wasn't even in a gang on the outside. They justified it by saying it was a way to categorize me for safety and security reasons. But my three fights wouldn't have occurred if I didn't have this label placed upon me. So who were they securing? Who was made to feel safe?

After one of these fights I was sprayed with a river of mace and thrown into solitary confinement. I spent twenty-three hours a day in a cell by myself for a month. The hour I didn't spend in my cell was the hour in which I showered. I spent the remainder of that time in a cage by myself with nothing to do but stare into space. This is what they called 'recreation.' When my mother came to see me, I was put in a fluorescent orange jumpsuit and wore handcuffs accompanied by shackles. The 'peace officers' used to joke and call it jailhouse jewelry.

After my stay at O-H Close, I went to Fire Camp. This is where the more privileged wards got to go if they expressed interest. When I got there it was summertime, so I was fighting fires as soon as I found out where my bed was going to be. We would fight the most colossal infernos, and it was strenuous work. However, it gave me a very real sense of accomplishment. We would put out these fires so they wouldn't harm families, animals, and landmarks. They gave me community service hours for doing this, and unlike other forms of community service, this really was community service. I only stayed at Fire Camp for a month because my falsely labeled gang membership caught up with me. I got into a fight and the camp quickly moved me out of there.

They shipped me to N-A Chaderjian, and this is where I did my hardest time. I slept three feet away from my toilet, so the smell of feces and urine became my closest neighbors. I guess they were also employed to rehabilitate me. I could hear brutal beatings, sexual assaults, and violent threats through the vents of adjacent cells. I had to lay face down on a two-inch mattress, which was placed on a block of concrete with my hands behind my back, just to get a tray of rancid mystery meatloaf put in my cell. I felt the burning

continued on next page

The Poetic Prisoner Beat Within Staff / Former CYA Ward

continued from previous page

suffocation of mace several times because I was near certain fights, even though I wasn't involved in them. The education system in there was so bad that I've seen people not go to school for years because a member of their gang got in a fight. I tore two ligaments in my left knee and didn't get any medical attention for eight months. It took me a year of writing grievances to finally have surgery done on my knee.

And at the end of my time a female counselor who would make the recommendation of whether I went home on parole or stayed in jail longer sexually harassed me. After I got out she called my mother's house asking to speak to me. She wasn't authorized to do that and I never gave her my mother's phone number. So why didn't she ever get the 'quality rehabilitation' I got?

When it comes to the inhumane conditions of YA, the list is endless. And although I'm not inclined to list every single injustice, I am willing to share my opinion on solutions to make the Youth Authority better.

The California Youth Authority needs to be destroyed before any productivity can appear. You can't build something effective on top of something rotten. You can't reform

something that has a broken foundation. Therefore, we should eliminate YA altogether. After we've done that, we need to use all of the resources it took to keep YA afloat and connect them to local programs across the state, for how can you teach a child how to live within his community by taking him out of his community? And lastly, follow up with these programs to make sure they're meeting the standards required to really rehabilitate their youth. It would be better for the youth, society, their communities, and even the state budget.

We've given the California Youth Authority too many chances to reform. They haven't straightened up yet, so what makes people think that they will get their act together all of a sudden. The Youth Authority will constantly use the victims of our crimes as a trump card to keep them from accepting responsibility for the inhumane conditions they savagely created. But like I said before, it's not wise for us to perpetuate more victimization by releasing these youth to the streets without rehabilitating them. YA and its wrongdoings were hidden behind those gleaming barbed wire fences. But with two suicides in the same week policy makers have finally seen the light. So let's shut the whole operation down now that YA is no mystery.

The More I Fight, The More I Remember

Lately, I've been on a journey
To point out the mistakes YA has made.
And the more I fight for this cause,
The more I remember those days.
I remember being in a cell
In one-hundred-degree weather.
I remember the times I spent nights
Thinking I would be locked up forever.
There were instances where I read old letters,
And cried myself to sleep.
Counting down the years, months,
And sometimes even the weeks.
I remember wanting to see my mother's face
Without her having to come to this place.
A sour taste seeped from the gates --
My grandmother's face filled with disgrace.
I now know how much they love me,
They supported me every step of the way.
They taught me to believe in myself,
Taught me to stand tall with every breath that I take.
I remember how to cook noodles,
I learned about a thousand recipes.
For if all I had was a noodle,
I wouldn't let the police get the best of me.
I remember the feeling of getting time added
To your already long sentence.
It's like getting your teeth knocked out
Right after experiencing the drill at the dentist.
I'm ready to redeem myself by being active
From January to December.
And I'll never run out of things to say,
For the more I fight, the more I remember.

**I remember how to cook noodles,
I learned about
a thousand recipes.**

**Understand that this
isn't a horror movie,
Understand that
this is my life!**

Coffee And Croissants

Envision this... A discussion...
About how our society is failing the youth.
Sitting in a coffee shop molding the fate of our children
While flakes of croissants melt on each tooth.
Envision a child without his father,
Why should I suffer for his mistake?
Why should I be left to choose a man to be
A fantasy male role model that I emulate?
Envision living in a house that wasn't a home,
And your happiest moments were spent alone.
Gradually your heart gets cold
Until it eventually turns to stone.
Envision a young single mother
Trying to teach two boys to be men.
Imagine these boys rebelling
While finding acceptance among negative friends.
Envision all the heartache and pain.
A generational cycle of shackles and chains.
The system took my father and now it is my father,
But it'll never love me the same.
So while you're drinking coffee and eating croissants
Discussing how we can make these wrongs right
Understand that this isn't a horror movie,
Understand that this is my life!

Glen Cornwell

San Quentin State Prison's Death Row

Nothing Added, Nothing Left Out... The Little Giant

In less than 24 hours, a little soft-spoken being, by the name of Jaturun Siripong will be executed in the state of California. After 16 years of appeals, his time has finally come.

There are many interesting facts that surround this little man's plight. One aspect of him that jumps out at me, is the fact that he didn't actually kill anybody.

From what I understand about his case, he was present and admitted to participating in a convenience store robbery in which his unnamed accomplice killed two people. For this, he is about to pay the ultimate price.

"J" as he is affectionately called, has never said who the actual shooter is in his case, but unfortunately for him, the state of California says that if you are involved in the commission of a felony, and somebody is shot and killed, then you're just as guilty as the person who pulled the trigger. So when "J" admitted his involvement, he literally placed his own head on the chopping block for the state to have its way with him.

As the situation plays out, I just saw on the news that our illustrious governor has denied clemency stating that, "J's" remorse was not enough to warrant any compassion from his office."

Of course his lawyers are still scrambling around, trying to find something that might save their clients life, but the California Death Machine is such, that once the motors of execution have gotten this far along the process, all our so-called protectors of justice, turn into hungry sharks in a feeding frenzy which can only be quenched with a death. All this in the name of the people.

What's odd to me is somehow I was under the obviously false impression that "J" is a person too.

I heard about him many months ago but only had the opportunity to meet him after he'd received a "stay of execution." As the clock ticked towards what would have been his death, every morning he'd walk by my cell for his morning shower with the most pleasant, almost peaceful demeanor, quietly bowing to some men along the way, while very briefly speaking to others.

When a friend came to me and asked, "Did I know "J" was a Buddhist monk?" It dawned on me just why he had this aura of confidence.

See Buddhists believe that life, death and re-birth are simply part of a circle of existence called "Samsara." A process that continues on for possibly eons, until the sentient beings reaches and end to Samsara or Nirvana, which is an existence free from suffering, grasping or illusion.

They also believe in the cause and effect of one's actions. That the suffering they face in this life is a direct result of their own actions, "in this life, as well as many past lives." (Commonly known as Karma.)

So with this belief firmly grounded in J's individual psyche, it dawned on me that he must believe that if he's executed, it will clear the bad karma he's generated from his own actions. Also, since Buddhists believe in rebirth, through intense meditation and practice, J' will have the right to focus at the time of death and insure himself a happy rebirth. Plus the entire travel from one stage to the next (called Bardos) will be a peaceful one.

Anyway my beliefs were confirmed when he received his stay of execution. Once they set J' off death watch, he was allowed to mingle with the 32 other men on North Segregation who are also condemned, but not so far along

in the process.

After greeting several of his old friends, he turned his attentions towards me as I approached. Introducing myself, I extended my hand, which he cupped with both his small warm hands.

When I tried to explain to him that I was learning about Buddhism and practicing the Dharma, he abruptly stopped me in mid-sentence by saying, "I know you are," which caught me completely off guard."

Since he's originally from Thailand, and I'm studying Tibetan Buddhism, the names I used for various practices were of different titles, but as I explained them, he quickly recognized what the object of each practice is.

I questioned him on the fact that he really was handling his last days well and since I too may find myself in the same situation, I wondered what his main focus could possibly be, when thinking about his death or the prospect of dying?

He told me that his plan was to simply, "let everything happen, and have no preconceived notions about any of it." He went on to say, "I'm going to handle my death as if I'm watching a movie. At each stage, I'll say, so that's what this practice was for, and that's what that practice was for, nothing added, nothing left out."

Since then we had several chances to kick conversation around, but those few first thoughts have stuck to my mind about J'. They've helped greatly with my practice, as well as my perception of how he feels about his life, and eventual death.

As stated in chapter's one and two, "I have this total fear and even reverence for my God." My faith in him has carried me through all that pain and suffering one faces on a day to day basis on Death Row, mentally and physically.

Interestingly, Buddhists don't have a place in their teachings for a Godhead, though I have been told they have no problem with the concept.

What Siddharta Gotama (The Buddha) taught in India some 500 years before the rise of Christianity, was a rule for human behavior, with no God attached. In Fact the "Wheel" was chosen by his followers as the symbol of life, with a natural law called "The Dharma" being its rule for self discipline.

J's confident aura impressed me even more when I pondered that, because for me, without God I may as well be falling from 40,000 feet out of the sky without a parachute. Especially when considering the finality of death.

So being a "Sponge for knowledge," I had to get as much understanding as he would allow. For myself, my family, and basically anybody I could reach who's interested.

Oddly, the truth be told, that's exactly what Buddhism is all about, compassion for all living things. I've come away from my talks with J' thinking that he has dedicated his life and especially his death to be for the benefit of others. With this very powerful dedication he literally became compassion.

This morning, I stayed awake after breakfast and waited for him to come by with his escorts for what might be his last shower. When he finally came by, I said "J!"

Hurrying as usual, appearing as not to want to hold his escorts up from their duties, he paused, turned towards me briefly with the most beautiful smile. After which he half bowed, faced forward again, and hurried on. He didn't say anything, didn't have to, the glow on his face said it all.

Somehow I get the impression that in his mind, if the powers that be do execute him tonight, they'll be doing him a favor, and with his death he'll be doing us a favor.

I can't speak for anyone else, but I'm sure my brief

continued on next page

Glen Cornwell

San Quentin State Prison's Death Row

continued from previous page

exchange with him has certainly done me a favor. During our brief interactions, J' didn't want to hear any of my tapes I have on Buddhism, but he did enjoy some of the books I happen to have.

Since J' was a monk long before I met him, I don't expect to reach his level of compassion or the understanding he displays, but I think practice does make perfect, being blessed with the opportunity to have met this soft-spoken little person, his example gives me a measuring stick to at least gauge my progress. I've heard many people call Buddhists, "worshippers of a false religion," As I am unqualified to defend their beliefs, I'll simply say, any religion that holds life as sacred, and even embraces death as a tool to benefit others speaks for itself.

One thing for sure, if everyone used themselves and their lives for the benefit of others, we wouldn't need places like San Quentin. Then again, if we didn't have Hell's like this, how could a little man from Thailand, who probably weighs less than a hundred and twenty pounds, be able to stand as tall as a mountain, and shine like the sun?

The Morning After:

Two cans of peaches and two glasses of tea. That's all the little giant wanted for his last meal. For me, it was a signal that, of any meal he could have asked for, food was of no importance. Maybe he was focused on something greater than a good meal?

At 12:04 am on Friday 9, 1999, the process of death began for J'. By 12:15 am it was over.

For the 74% of California's population who's in favor of execution, their thirst was quenched by J's pre-arranged demise. Before his execution, I saw the brother of one of the victims in J's case on the news. He said, "I'll only be satisfied by Siripong's execution." I can't help but wonder, after sixteen years of housing that kind of hatred for J' in his heart and mind, was he really able to let go afterwards?

Deep down inside, I imagine that there's very few people who will ever really consider all the facts surrounding this page of history. Only the finale outcome seems important to the naked eye.

As I sit here locked down for now, with my pencil working overtime, and my mind clicking a million miles a second, a couple of truths just jump right out at me surrounding J's execution. First the idea that J' was able to die in a state of meditation and possibly be saved, or whatever his version of lasting peace is (reincarnation) was one good point. But on the flip side of his death, I couldn't help but feel sad that the people who were killed in the robbery for which he was called to account for, may never have gotten the chance, especially since they were murdered in a terrifying manner.

Also I don't believe his execution solved anything for anybody but J'. Everyone else came up missing out. The victims' families who housed all this hatred for so many years are left with this gaping sore spot in their souls, with no place to point their aggression or hatred. Hopefully the useless baggage of hatred won't turn on them after this (God forbid).

Meanwhile, J's friends and family have lost a warm kind being, a gentle little giant if you will, who's touched everyone's heart in one way or another who's ever spent more than a few minutes with him.

As for me, since I'd only just met him and actually been in his presence from the time he'd received his stay of execution until his death, I only had time to learn mainly from his inspirational example.

You'd think I'd have a million things to add about the last time I saw him, especially since, as we looked into each others eyes through the wire mesh and bars, that right after midnight, he'd probably be dead. But the fact of the matter is, we said nothing to each other. He simply turned, look into my soul with compassionate eyes and a wide Kool-Aid smile, then bowed, turned and walked away.

Since all of us literally have a death sentence, I think it's important for each of us to look at our lives. To look at all the things we take for granted, our selfishness, over inflated egos, and the way we waste our days and nights jumping from one direction to the next. Being consumed by lust, greed and last but not least hatred. Most of us don't even stop to think, "What if my life should end at midnight tonight? Where would my focus be? Would I go off into the darkness clinging to all the props I'm allowed on this level of existence, or would my focus be on love and compassion for all living beings?"

The idea of softly floating into the night with no preconceived notions or attachments sounds almost too good to be true, nothing added, nothing left out.

How many of us actually take the time out to stop and see what's bouncing around in our minds? When do we take the time out to slow down and bring our minds back home to rest?

If I learned one thing from J', I came away from him with the firm belief "That our minds are the most powerful tools we have, and our perception of even our death, is of the utmost importance." After all, lets each of us ask ourselves, "How many of us would only request 2 cups of tea, and 2 cups of canned peaches for our last meal?"

Some Buddhist schools of thought believe that the sentient being must travel many, many eons of lives and deaths along the wheel of Samsara, (or the circle of life) before one finally reaches Nirvana (or enlightenment) which is the highest level of existence in Buddhist teaching, free from all attachments and suffering. Others believe that once the sentient being is born into a life that leads him/her to be attracted to the Dharma (or Buddhist doctrine), then that lucky person can actually reach Nirvana in that one lifetime. It's also believed that some beings choose to come back to the circle of Samsara from Nirvana, for the benefit of all living creatures.

I don't know where Jaturun Siripong's beliefs fit in as to any of those theories, but as I write these few thoughts about him, something keeps coming back to mind over and over again, and for the life of me I can't seem to shake it, "Two cups of tea, and two cans of peaches."

**Two can's of peaches and two glasses of tea.
That's all the little giant wanted for his last meal.**

JOEY PEREZ It is rare for The Beat to receive pieces from California's death row (the largest in the country); it is even rarer when that condemned prisoner came through some of the juvenile halls where The Beat conducts programs, like YGC and Hillcrest. But it is the power and quality of his writing, the wisdom in his advice, that makes Joey Perez such an outstanding addition to our family of Beat Without writers. All we can do is urge every youngster in every juvenile hall to read his tragically familiar experiences — and hope that you can learn from them before you're forced to learn from your own. Joey Perez writes us from San Quentin's death row.

My Life's Past

It's already done and finished with
Old days were no fun
Stepping in bullshh
Now will I get deep with this
Or choose to finish my life with strife
The past is over
The same way death currently hovers
I'm a short-lived legend
In the past from 12 to 27
The bread has leavened
And life drains from the stake driven
The past is filled with bad mistakes
Wrongful kind of breaks
My 'hood was my life and soaked with crime
My life with God to be a virgin was hard
So I failed and turned out odd
My life's past filled with wrath
Anger can't be washed off in a bath
It's such a soul-draining drag
My life's past was the beginning of my end
Failure my friend
From hell to heaven and back again
Playing both sides of the fence
Good and bad, a thug then a gent
Gentlemen take a hint
I can't cry over spilt milk
And tears never dry
From those who've been killed
My past made my present
Puerto Rican-Irish descent
My past was trash
My past was sad not glad
Forever I leave off that mask
I don't think so, too hard of a task

Confidence

Be true to yourself Heed your inner voice. Trust your instincts. Follow your dream to what's right for you. Create positive thinking, banish negative thoughts. Surround yourself with enthusiastic achiever.

You are not alone, no matter how miserable and lonely you feel. Many have been in your shoes. You can move on. Keep learning. Open your eyes and ears to information, sources that will make you a better-informed person — newspapers, books, etc.

Assess the situation. If you hit a block or failure, step back and analyze what's wrong. What's in your control and what's not? Take credit for all your accomplishments. Write down all the things you've managed and organized in your life.

Aspire higher. Don't get lazy. Keep on stretching. Emulate those you admire and learn their secrets of success. Don't bottle things up. Keep the channels open. Get feedback from caring, but honest individuals you trust.

Take care of yourself, whether it's healthier eating habits, daily exercise or improving your appearance. Don't feel guilty about yourself. Keep in circulation. It's natural to want to pull back and lay low when things aren't going well. Maintaining an active schedule and high visibility may benefit you far more than self-pity.

Live From Death Row

What's crackin', Beat? I hope that all's well for everyone under these subhuman conditions they call rehabilitation. That's a joke. In Cali there is no rehabilitation, only warehousing and pockets as deep as Trump's.

Well, this is my second installment to The Beat since receiving my first issue. I don't know who decided to send me this magazine, but whoever it was, I thank you very much. I don't know if my first letter and poems were received or even published, but I'll continue to write and share my pain, experience, and encouragement 'cause I've been where you are. So let me introduce myself to everyone.

My name is Joey Perez, better known as Young Rock from San Francisco's finest Excelsior District. I'm currently on Death Row at San Quentin for a robbery-murder. I'm 32 years old, and been down for six years now.

I was a lot like all of you now in juvenile and came from broken homes. My father was a hope-to-die heroin addict, and my moms sent me to Gram's house 'cause she had her own problems. I lived with her until I was twelve. She died on my 12th birthday.

After her death, I went nuts. I went to YGC, Hillcrest, group homes, Glenwood and YA. I ran from every placement they put me in 'cause I was filled with pain and anger. Life was so unfair to me. I felt alive and wanted when I was acting a damn fool and running from my inner demons. Instead of trying to find out why I was so mad, they just kept locking me up in the hall.

So I'd escape from the hall, YGC and Hillcrest, but that just made it worse. Back then they didn't have The Beat, so I'd write down my feelings on paper. When I discovered I had talent to write, my time got easier, but once I got out, I forgot all about that nonsense and went straight to the 'hood. I'd start committing crimes to make up for lost time. I was gaining a reputation as a Young Sav, and it just made me commit bigger and bolder crimes.

Now I sit here on The Row 'cause of my past. Don't think it can't happen to you 'cause it can. And your homies... you can forget about them, 'cause once them cuffs are slapped on, your homies are nowhere to be found. And you know the sad part about that is I would've killed for them, or be killed. I was shot five times reppin' my 'hood, and where them fools at now? Out of sight, out of mind. Don't think it can't happen to you 'cause it will, real quick.

For those of you who have a talent to write, keep writing, 'cause you'll only get better mentally and physically. I mean physically in the sense you'll enjoy the respect people give you for your talents, and with a grain of luck, you'll want to write instead of being on the block.

Any of you in YGC who have Gabe Cavillo as a PO, trust me, he'll help you in any way he can if you really try. Believe me, I grew up with him, and his life could've been just like yours, but he wanted better for himself. You have to want the same thing.

And any of you in Hillcrest who have Mr. Torre as a PO, I know he can be screwed up sometimes, but he loves children and hates to see our youth in trouble. If you keep it real with him, he'll keep it real with you. If you want or need help, just ask for it, but really mean it.

With that I'll end this and hope that just one of you can grasp something from my writings. Take care, stay strong, keep writing, and always keep your head to the sky. Much love to The Beat and its readers.

**The high is as simple as a smile
or as complex as comfort given
to someone in need**

Apathy Born

Distant outward, lonely inward

Scared of hitting, hurting, not fitting, not feeling

Self-imposed removal, self-defense, self-pity, selfish sometimes

Sometimes the gates are slightly parted with caution

Sometimes the gates are thrown wide open to shower

My idea of what I think love should be on someone

In hopes that sometimes that same love will be reflected

Returned

Rejected because my idea of love was a flood, a burden overwhelming

Retreated in pain, in shame of my lack of balance

I do not understand

Coldly disconnected, withdrawn, protected

Guarded, infected with the disease of mistrust

Self-esteem is my personal sandcastle, my thin outer garment of patchwork

The high is as simple as a smile or as complex as comfort given to someone in need

The low is finding out that some someone has closed their generous heart to me

The distance between the two is the birthplace of apathy

JEFFREY ROTH We feel a little guilty when we get pieces from a new writer that we love — and we know that they are based on the pain of his prison existence. We wish it were otherwise, but we can't help liking what we like — and we like Jeffrey Roth's poems, one about growing old in prison, and another that reveals the monotony, loneliness and desperation of what it is to be a prisoner. JR sends us his writing from a Colorado State Prison.

Growing Old

Each day I painfully look into his eyes
And see death slowly claiming him
Breathlessly he runs
Trying to hide, yet
Persistent as a fox after a hare
It chases him

Too stubborn to just give up
I see him strugglin' to survive
I hear his lungs gasp for that
Life-giving force
I feel his chest holding back
His strong heart's beat
Like a damn holding back a raging river

And when the struggle becomes too great
I see that dam break
A flood streaming down his cheeks
I find it harder to look at him
So I try to turn away
But ever cell has mirrors

Dear Beat Within

First of all, allow me to introduce myself. I am Jeffrey A. Roth, an inmate in a Colorado State Prison. I am 41 years old (42 on April 16th), and have been in prison since 1982.

I have served 22 years so far on a 25-50 year sentence for a murder that happened during a burglary when I was 18. Over the last 22 years, I have lost my great grandparents, my grandparents, and my parents who have all died. My sister came to visit for the first time 10 years or so ago, but now she doesn't answer my letters any more. I guess it just became too painful for her.

I guess what I'm trying to say is I have no one on the streets.

Ledaro Pennix Ledaro Pennix, a Beat OG, has gotten back in touch with us and you. He offers you an over-all critique of how he feels about the affects of prison life on him and everyone incarcerated. He's presently in Pelican Bay State Prison, but will soon return to the SHU (Security Housing Unit) at Corcoran State Prison.

Untitled

Within this underworld of madness, I consider myself a revolutionary, for I refuse to submit to an unjust system. I do not yield to this system's treachery, folly, antics, corruption, misleading interpretations, nor do I comply to its shady rules and regulations, which are designed to manipulate and impede one's reality towards this system's true intent. That intent is not to reform, but to nullify and/or negate the inmate the right to reform, so that they remain systematically lethargic, induced by the recycling process promoted by the powers that be.

My constant struggle within this underworld is a broad one. It's a non-stop process that requires sacrifice, dedication, endurance, intelligence and an unrelenting perspective that with such above aforementioned endeavors, change will come.

Though my life is complicated in here, because of my plight, I take much pride in my struggle, because I believe my

**I find it harder to look at him
So I try to turn away
But ever cell has mirrors**

Prison Man

To a man inside these walls so gray
Without a trace of light
Today's the same as yesterday
And both as dark as night
You ask about tomorrow, well,
It'll be the same as all the rest have been
I'll get up, exist another day
Then go back to sleep again
I've seen one man take his own life
Another just lay down and die
I guess that they just couldn't stand
The loneliness inside
They say we have no feelings
That we don't laugh, hurt or cry
But you could flood a might river
With the tears that have filled these eyes
I thank heaven for my mother who sat weeping
With a picture in her hand
It's a picture of her only son
A lonely prison man

I've never turned away a hungry man
Or refused anyone a ride
I've laughed with those around me
And hurt when people cried
You may think we're different
That you're not the same as I
But one day you'll see the trips the same
It's just a different train we ride
You might think I'm bitter
That's really not the case
I hold no hate for any man
I see some good in every face
And I don't want your pity
For I'm the one to blame
And when once again I walk among you
I won't hide my face in shame!

**I refuse to submit to
an unjust system**

struggle, my resistance, gives nourishment for those who starve at the table of ignorance. Ignorance is bliss for those who are mentally brainwashed and accept the conditions of this foul and distorted underworld.

But for those who are rebellious, conscious fighters for justice, we know that ignorance is a cancer that plagues those who are asleep and without the cure, consciousness. Then such cancer may to them appear to be bliss, when, in fact, it's actually eating away and deteriorating the soul of their conscious being, reality.

This is why I make it my goal to teach and enlighten all who don't know, because I strongly believe that knowledge is power and with such power, we can initiate change.

I have a question—what is your endeavor in life? Mine is to change the world for the greater good. How will I do it, is still a mystery to me, but I believe I can do it.

MICHAEL L. OWENS

Michael L. Owens is an OG to reckon with. His following contributions offer plenty of insight that can only benefit us readers. This man has a story to tell, hopefully a story none of us will follow especially the part of being a lifer. Michael does his part to hopefully curb your appetite for destruction. He writes us from High Desert State Prison in Susanville, CA

Dear Beat

Peace and blessings to you all. My name is Michael Owens and I'm a 29-year-old African American serving time at High Desert State Prison.

I recently received a new cellmate who is a subscriber. I'm impressed with the effort that you continually put forth in giving these kids a voice. I didn't find my love of poetry and prose until I was already a lifer. Some days I wonder if things would have turned out different had I learned the power of the written word as a youth. In any event, I felt it upon my heart to send a letter and one of my pieces.

In closing, let me say this, thank you for the service you provide. May God bless you all and grant you success in all you attempt that is righteous.

The Cyclist

The First Lap:

All I have are skinned knees,
And the lesson that they earned me.
Rejecting wisdom from all sources,
Never thinking it concerned me.
I disregarded my daddy's scars,
My brother's scab didn't mean a thing.
They feared the iodine,
But I'd yet to learn its sting.
And every time they yell "slow down!"
I'd go a lil' faster.
Somehow believing manhood equals
Flirting with disaster.

The Second Lap:

My knees are covered in scabs
And though they ain't a pretty sight
To me they are a symbol
Of my choices wrong or right.
Wounds of battles, fresh in thought,
Not healed completely yet.
Cracking, stinging rebuke,
Not letting me forget.
Sometimes I'd ignore them,
Rushing to be done,
Rewarding by impatience.
To be back where I begun.

The Third Lap:

See these scars on my knees?
Player, they tell a story.
Of how prudent a man
Was born of a youthful rush toward glory.
Now I can clearly see
The times I wasted all my learning
Now I've come full circle,
And for you, the wheels are turning.
All of us must ride the cycle,
But not all get up from fallin'
So choose your path with caution,
And slow down when you hear me callin'.

PQ>>>

Now I can clearly see
The times I wasted all my learning

Your Choice

This goes out to all the young thugs and D-boys/girls, who are reading this. You will recognize and take heed to my words now if you're smart. If you're not, don't trip; we'll get a another chance to holla when you wind up here at High Desert, or one of CA's other Max. Security Institutions. When I see you, I'll know you immediately, because I used to be you. I was in the same position that you're in now, the same choices that you have before you, I had. And I made the wrong decision.

See, I've been in and out the system since 1988, and now I'm serving four consecutive terms of life without the possibility of parole, plus seventy-nine years. I had a lot of 2nd chances and a lot of opportunities to change my ways, but I wasted all of them. At the time, I couldn't see life away from he block/grind/homies.

I didn't know then what I know now. I'm writing because I want you all to see that when you get out, that is your opportunity to beat the system, don't waste it.

Now for all you youngstas who have already got their minds made up that this G life is the one they want; here's what you can look forward to.

The first thing you'll lose after catching some serious time and coming to prison is your lady (and ladies, your man will bounce too). So if you gonna be a thug, I hope you never want a wife/husband.

Next, you will get to see how your homies really feel about you. That same cat you would kill and die for, won't write back, accept your calls, or send you five dollars for a box of soups. Slowly but surely all the homies will be too busy to get at you. Busy changing their lives, or busy doing time their self, or busy dying in your hood.

Oh yeah, also your family is so tired of seeing you in a cage that they start to fall off too. After so many years, the only time you'll really hear from them is when another loved one dies. There are few things that compare to losing loved ones and not being able to go pay respects. You might have already experienced a little of this abandonment, and most of you all are gonna get out. How do you think it's gonna be when you ain't never going home? You all need to be using this time to do some serious thinking about it.

These are just a fraction of what you young G's can look forward to. And I haven't even mentioned the living conditions, the treachery, and violence of prison life. They say only the strong survive, but I've seen the strongest crumble behind these walls. This isn't the place to be, and you don't have to go this route. It don't matter how swell you play the game, in here, somebody always cheats.

My sincerest advice to you all is this: at all cost, get your life straight! Blaze your own path and do the right thing, cats will respect you for it. I know right now, it might seem like you can't do anything but be in the game, but that's just the destroyer whispering lies in your ear. If you're ready and your serious, just ask the Most High to show you the way out, and God will smile down on you. What do you have to lose? You've already tried it your way, and all it got you was a step closer to being where I am. Get yourself a Bible and get up on some real game.

If you do, you'll learn how to get out, stay out, and do something positive with your life. And before long, the OG's that you always looked up to, will be looking up to you because you will have done what we couldn't - survive the ghetto; but if you keep on doing what you've been doing, don't trip, you will have plenty of time to learn these things in here with me. The state has plenty of room and I ain't going anywhere.

Sending strength and respect, in solidarity.

**They say only the strong survive,
but I've seen the strongest
crumble behind these walls.
This isn't the place to be, and
you don't have to go this route**

THE SYSTEM

The Beat Without



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SHAWMBA N. JONES It's such an honor to have back in our pages, our East Coast homie, Shawmba N. Jones, who wrote the following two very thoughtful pieces from the Delaware Correctional Center. Shawmba has been a solid player from the get. We appreciate everything he has delivered to us these last couple of years. If we are not mistaken Shawmba is very close to his release date. We're sure we'll hear from him again, although we haven't been too good in getting back at him, we still very much so appreciate his commitment.

What the System Can't Take or Break

One, I'll never let incarceration take my will and drive to become a better person upon my evident release. I refuse to become institutionalized, disenfranchised, categorized, castracized, or dehumanized due to the debilitating circumstances surrounding incarceration in a "modern day slavery" disguised by corporations and deceived American opinion as "prison"...

This "just-us" system can never take away who I am, the essence of what I wish to become upon my release, or the heart I've grown to recognize as the reason I strive to be a better person upon my release.

Self-education in this prison is how I spend each day. I plan for a life of success – not of failure. I was taught one thing that today I see as true... Knowledge without application is just information...to me, that's basically saying that knowledge without using it to benefit your saying, that knowledge without using it to benefit your life is useless...

So to all my young brothers and sisters on lock, please open you eyes and wake up and begin to learn life, about business, because in today's society, if your not out to build your own business, you'll be basically a hired slave working 5-7 days a week for "less than" your worth as a person...

Here's a serious look on life for any youth seeking to learn how to be an entrepreneur: Business start-up loan for ages 10-20 years of age, Youth Project Loans - \$5,000 to \$25,000 (202) – 720-1632 from the Small Business Association... Deep right? So if you wanna start up a business, a Flea Market stand, etc., 1) write a business plan, 2) apply by calling the phone number given, 3) apply for a business license and E.I.N. – and pay yourself...

And this the tip of the information I've learned to start changing my life, are you the reader ready to change your life for the better? If so, this is what the system can never take away...You just gotta believe...

Revolution Through Evolution

The past becomes the present through our actions as ignorant individuals destroying a world where generation upon generation will be after we finally cease to exist, we resist the temptation to do good and instead seek solace in sin doing that which can hinder our forward progress as a person, as a people, man, woman, child...

Denial that we are as guilty of genocide if we sold drugs, prostituted, or neglected our children due to our own selfish ways.

We are also guilty because of the fact that "we" do this in "our neighborhoods" where "we" live, not on the White House lawn, or Rodeo Drive, Hollywood Blvd., or Broadway New York City...

Death has no face and you don't have to be dead to not be alive...

The government number on yo' chest or back banishes you, and the only way to overcome that is to evolve as a person, build yourself, your mind, and seek higher knowledge.

Only through "us" as a people; White, Black, Latino, whatever, coming together in "unity" and "peace", will we step over the boundaries that hold us back, and evolve into that which we aspire to be...

Death has no face and you don't have to be dead to not be alive...

ABRAHAM WILLIAMS The callousness of the prison system into which we confine more people per capita than any nation in the world is graphically and dramatically revealed in this piece by Corcoran State Prison inmate, Abraham Williams. What he describes is the disregard for human life the prison staff demonstrates, but in a very real sense, this system is bleeding all of us to death.

I've been in those same shoes all of you are in right now, and now look at me. I'm in prison.

Bleeding To Death

I'm almost time served in seven months. Man, it's a different world in here. C-Os kill a man and cover it up, saying it was suicide. It's hard to stay focused in here because of all the corruption. You never know when these cops will crack the door and come after you!

All of you youngsters out at placements, juvy, YA — you youngsters got it made compared to here. I've been in those same shoes all of you are in right now, and now look at me. I'm in prison. I wish I was back in the Hall or at those placements instead of being in here, man!

Hey, it's the next step to hell from here. The cops at juvy, YA, staff at placements, they are nothing compared to these cops. These cops got juice, that's why they do what they do, because the higher ranked officers back them up. It all falls down on you.

For instance, say the cops are "in the mood," they'll take you down to the ground, and put you in the hole. Next thing you know, you got a DA referral for assaulting a peace officer. These cops got nothing else better to do!

Look at what I said earlier in this letter: they killed a man three doors from my cell! This man was banging and banging on

his door all night on Feb. 1st, until 5:00am when it got quiet. When shift change came at 6:00am they looked in the cell, and called the ambulance. He was pronounced dead when they arrived. He was banging and banging asking for help all night, and these cops just ignored him. Now, that's scandalous!

To top it off, the cops covered it up by saying it was suicide. Now, I'm going to tell you how he died. He was on a daily dialysis, and he had a shunt in his arm to transport blood. Well, he was messing with it. The shunt was connected to a main artery, and when he was messing with it, it moved and blood was squirting everywhere. He bled to death! His cell looked like a slaughterhouse with so much blood!

The question I have for you youngsters that are reading this is, do you want to be in this position to see what I just saw? These cops could have helped the man, but they ignored him! When you see something like that, you wonder, "Man, can this happen to me?"

Damn sure! It will! So you youngsters better keep your noses clean if you don't want to experience this or even worse.

To The Beat, good looking out on everything you do for these youngsters and as adults that are having hard times. Thank you.

JASON COMPA TRÉAS Hey, this next piece is simply icing on the cake to this very important of an issue we call "the system issue." From the beginning, our next writer has been a Beat favorite for many of us readers, and this week artist, Jason Compa Tréas steps up huge in telling us all how The Beat Within mural came about. We first met Jason in 1997 when he was in Ad. Seg. in New Folsom State Prison. From there he spent the remainder of his prison sentence in the SHU in Pelican Bay State Prison. Today, and for the last year since his release he has been a major player, a colleague in our office and community. With that said, let us encourage you to read the following story of how The Beat mural, which is featured on the cover of this issue, came about.

Giving something back. That is an ideal cradled in the minds and hearts of many men and women

The Beat Within Mural

It is hard to believe that I have already been out of prison a year. Since my first arrest, at the brave yet foolish age of twelve, I have never been out of an incarceration facility longer than six months. I'm breaking new ground here and as each day of being free goes by I am convinced more and more that I really am a new man, that the traps I fell through and into as a youngsta are no longer a threat. I know how to side step them now, and in many cases I have learned how to turn them stumbling blocks into stepping stones. Pero, OUCH! How long it took and how hard it was to get from where I was to where I am.

As much as there is to say about the last year of freedom I have cherished, I am writing this to tell you about one story in particular. That is about The Beat Within mural I was able to paint here at The Beat Within/Pacific News Service office in downtown San Francisco with the help of some really beautiful and inspiring people, to say the least.

I happen to think this is probably the most appropriate way for me to re-enter The Beat pages as a contributing writer after my way too long absence as such. So let me start at what is almost the beginning.

Some time in 2001 The Beat Within's founder and editor in chief, my boss, comrade and friend, David Inocencio invited me to paint a mural here at what was then their new office after my release from Pelican Bay State Prison SHU. I had spent the last six years of the ten I served corresponding with him from solitary confinement. Dave can tell you that from my first response to his request I was excited about the prospect. There I was contemplating my release and what employment opportunities I would have as an ex-convict and still validated "prison gang member" (I paroled under the same status and am still pursuing appeals to challenge this) when his offer came through.

Knowing how shaded my future still looked from behind the thick concrete walls of Pelican Bay I considered it a real opportunity to help me in my transition back to freedom. I would have been foolish not to jump on it. Besides, the idea of painting a mural really appealed to me as an artist, not to mention the fact that I would be able to really give something back, something concrete and more meaningful than the simple yet always profoundly sincere "thanks" I had always finished my letters with.

Giving something back. That is an ideal cradled in the minds and hearts of many men and women whom have been through the gutters of life and somehow are able to rediscover their humanity. What we all feel at one point or another is a deep shame and guilt for all the wrongs we have committed against our own people and those like us. This feeling is what inspires change. Believe me, I'm not talking out the side of my neck with some old humanist rhetoric. When and where consciousness and a developing conscience meet a sense of responsibility is always born.

After a life-time of always taking, even what didn't belong to me or what I had not earned, from my cold lonely world of one, I yearned to just have an opportunity to give back. To demonstrate and convince myself and others about the transformations my mind and heart had really endured.

From Pelican Bay I asked David what kind of mural we were talking about, what did he want the content to be and what kind

of liberties did I have with incorporating my own ideals into a mural which would basically represent The Beat Within?

To my surprise he offered me a blank canvas and asked only that the mural really be reflective of The Beat Within experience and how I interpret that from reading The Beat publication. What I thought would be an artistic challenge turned out to be an easy translation. I basically applied what a great artist and companero taught me after my release, in what was a naturally inherent way, that is to translate the written word into a visual/artistic one.

Like the Indigenous tribes of Latin America or Africa I was using art as a hieroglyphic language, a language capable of transcending all the borders and cultural differences. I wanted people who looked at this mural to feel and think the same way they would after reading an issue of The Beat Within. Fortunately my first sketch was received well by David and The Beat staff.

Within 48 hours of my release, which is a story of desperation and triumph in itself, I was at the offices of The Beat Within meeting for the first time in person David and the other Beat/PNS staff I had begun to correspond with before my release. After all the formalities of introductions and just trying to stay emotionally and mentally sober after our first real encounter we were already discussing what kind of work was available for me with and with out regard to the mural.

By the time we started the mural in august of 2003 I had barely been out four months and had picked up my first paint brush only a few weeks before that. Intimidated as hell by the scope of what I had obligated myself to accomplish yet determined as ever to not let myself or my friends and colleagues down I found myself being schooled about mural painting 101 by a 23 year old Mission artist and writer from YO! Magazine. Some of you might recognize Josue Rojas' work from the pages of YO! Which always features one of my favorite comic strips, Publick.

We began the mural by meeting with The Beat Within staff to hold a discussion on the content of the mural sketch I had sent from Pelican Bay and have a democratic vote to determine if the content was appropriate and acceptable. To my surprise, relief and confidence everyone liked the sketch and was ready to see it on the wall.

We had one problem though, the office couldn't expend money for a mural project when were already grinding on the job just to pay salaries and wages. In true Beat style The Beat Within family pulled together and folks like Matt Melamed (he actually might have rallied all of the donations!) stepped up to get folks to kick in some funds for supplies only. In a few weeks we had this together and even had some surplus funds, which we put to good use by throwing a dedication ceremony/party. More about that later though...

Before we committed to putting up the mural Josue invited me to do a freestyle mural with him and a couple of cats from San Jose so that I could become more familiar and confident with a brush. This was one of those experiences that really demonstrated and allowed me to appreciate more fully the wisdom and gifts that Josue had despite his young age. I remember thinking afterwards that the transition from being a paper and pen artist to a canvas and brush artist wasn't really that difficult. In a way it's like the change you might feel when

JASON COMPA TRÉAS

It wasn't long before everyone who worked away at their desks found them-selves intrigued by the process

you go from driving a small car like a Honda to something way bigger like an Escalade, it feels a lil' awkward at first but the fundamentals are still the same: it's just driving.

Along with Josue's help I had The Beat's own Eric Strenger, who does the layout for The Beat along with facilitating workshops. Eric is by far one of the most talented artists I have ever met and he has this laid back vibe. Eric and myself clicked real early here at the office. It wasn't long before we were at my house swimming, riding motorcycles and him teaching me how to air brush in between our working on the mural. Along with Josue, Eric taught me a lot about painting in general and he put up what I think is one of the most powerful aspects of the mural. That is the replication of the first Beat issue which featured an image of Tupac.

I won't get into the logistics of the mural here, that is describing what kind of paint we used and all, it is all too tedious. I do want to share with you all how ever the deeper story behind this small accomplishment of mine, what the mural means to me not only in it's content but in also it's value to me as an artist and ex-con. There are also a few things to say about the process...

Josue and myself began painting one late night when the office was empty. I will never forget that evening because it was Nick's birthday.

Nick is a 20 year old up and coming graff artist who also works here at Pacific News Service. Around 10 pm we began setting up shop and with nothing else to do on his birthday Nick came in and helped us out until about 1 am. This is one of the unexpected parts of the mural. Nick's contribution with prepping the canvas, which is 8 feet by 18 feet, made us want to invite more people to "touch" the mural. This isn't to say we were trying to have a lot of folks help us get a job done, but rather that we wanted more people in the office to feel that the mural was theirs, that they played a part in it and from this experience they would appreciate it more. Not to mention; it was a great way for me to become more familiar with the diversity of people we have working here.

It wasn't long before everyone who worked away at their desks found them-selves intrigued by the process began coming over on small breaks to ask us about the process as we painted. One by one we invited them to be a part of it, to paint a line, white box or even more complicated parts such as a young woman's arm, which Beat facilitator and editor Donna Hunter painted.

There were many times during this project when I can remember just sitting back and having out of body experiences.

The mural ended up taking a lot more time than we anticipated. We didn't finish until October. Through out the long summer however we painted in the afternoons, stole nice lunch breaks to go eat at the Mission District Taquerias and run to facilitate presentations and workshops with my colleagues from The Beat Within in between. When school started up I found myself committed too much more work with The Beat Within, and finally moving into my first apartment as a grown man and alone, the mural took second place to other priorities. By the beginning of November we were putting finishing touches on the mural and getting ready to display it at the (NCM) New California Media Expo. NCM is a division of Pacific News Service and The Beat Within's fellow organization.

The NCM Expo was a hit for The Beat Within Mural. Many spectators complemented The Beat Within as definitely the best set up in the entire expo (there were

other contributions of course, props to Arlene Mitri and Eric for making the cell replication!). We got The Beat mural featured in the San Francisco Bay View newspaper and a lot of folks took pictures in front of it. This capped off the murals road tour and we were back to the office figuring out ways to decorate the boarders of the walls outside the mural. Eventually we hung Beat Within art in frames all around the upper half of the mural with Eric and Arlene's home made cell on the side. It is a really stunning thing to see the first time in an office you probably wouldn't expect it.

I think that if you could compare the degree of transformations I underwent from the day I started the mural until the day I finished to miles traveled, the distance would wrap around this globe.

Working on this mural really liberated me in a lot of ways, for instance it became the calendar I used to remember certain things that were going on in my life at that point. This was something big to me because I noticed that in the SHU one of the means the prison uses to break men and dehumanize them is to remove them from their natural environments, to remove them from nature itself. The absence of experiencing the simple yet profound change of seasons can take a real psychological toll on a man's mental stability if he is not prepared to deal with it. I can remember what I did every year that I was free as a child and young man, almost to the exact date. But up in Pelican Bay SHU every day was the same inside your cell and when you went to your lil' concrete kennel called a "yard" there were only three kinds of days; gray walls and gray skies with rain, without rain and the half dozen days or so a year where you MIGHT catch a glimpse of the sun somewhere in the passing of your yard time.

Even now I can't remember what date and in some case what year, many of the thing I experienced in prison occurred. So you might understand a lil' more now why I appreciated something like this as a liberating experience.

There is an over riding theme to this mural and that is one of duality. It is painted in black and white, there is an overall positive energy battling a negative energy, there are injustices occurring and there are people fighting for justice and other enjoying it. There is the glaring yet dirty, ugly yet beautiful, man made vs. nature made scope to the entire mural that I think any one reading and seeing this mural will realize and feel.

In February 2004 we had a Beat Within mural dedication ceremony where folks that contributed financially or other wise to the murals success and The Beats success, that just about includes everyone who ever read The Beat, was invited to come enjoy an evening in our office, check out our mural, be informed more about what we do and how we do it, eat some food and hear about how we pulled this off. It was a really proud night for me. There were my closest friends and colleagues all there to celebrate this accomplishment I am now ready to admit I had a big part in.

And now I am here, introducing all The Beat readership to check out one more thing our office has to be proud of, and confident that because I have been in exactly many of the places you are reading this from, that you will dig it in some way, 'cause it was envisioned and created while stepping back to walk a lil' while in each of your shoes, close my eyes and imagine how we must and will make IT be and yet still listening to your voices echo through out my train of thought all day after reading The Beat Within.

This is your mural too ya'll. You all helped create it.

ALEX MARTINEZ This is Alex Martinez's first stab at contributing to The Beat Within. He steps up huge in telling us readers his thoughts about prison and the choices he has made in bettering his life. We're not saying what he says is right or wrong, the bottom line is you have to make your own choices when it comes to living in the correctional system, and hopefully those choices will only better your situation. Live and learn. Alex Martinez writes us from the state prison in Tracy California, DVI.

Prison Time

It's waiting on letters when you're doing time
And your family won't write or send you a dime
It's waiting on a visit that never takes place
From friends or loved ones who forget your face
There it's hearing them lie and saying that they are trying
Making you promise, but you know that they're lying
It's making plans with someone who you thought you knew
But their plans suddenly change and it didn't include you
It's hearing them say how much they care,
But in your time of need, they're never there
It's hearing them promise and it goes straight to your head
But when push comes to shove, they leave you for dead
It's feelings and love, honor, and pride
Pain and emotions and hurting inside
It's expressing yourself to your loved ones and friend
But they can't feel your pain because you're in the pen.
It's calling and hearing a block on the phone
But you maintain because life goes on
It's really messed-up when you're doing time
But that's prison life: out of sight, out of mind.

Personal Thoughts

I am 25 years old. I've been in and out of the system since I was a young teen. In my young times of being behind bars I thought it was just one big game, and in reality I was just one big lame, with no shame or respect for myself.

It took half my life to realize all I'm doing is hurting myself and my family deeply. I do not believe there is such a thing as homies, 'cause all they do is backstab you. My only friend is God and my family, and I know they won't turn their backs on me.

I'm on the other side of the wall where the grass is greener. I don't have to worry about the politics of the prison's games, or worry about who is gonna stab the next person. We ain't about racism, we are about showing love and respect, helping one another to do better at life.

On this side where I am is all dropouts from all types of different gangs. These men have grown up and realize their nonsense and childish conduct and outlook that they have in there so called geological differences. Here we are all united and getting better educations so we can have resources to fall back on, something positive upon our release back into society.

On the other side of the wall, where the grass is dry you have your co called active gang members who ain't doing nothing but acting portraying to be our homeboy. Yeah, I was dumb once and learned from it, and I ain't going to be dumb again by coming to prison and allowing another inmate to dictate my program, by trying to give me racist rules and policies on how I'm suppose to conduct myself within these walls. They can't even get there own life straight but they would pat you on the back to pretend to be your brother and tell you, you have to go stab somebody to earn your respect. Ha, ha, ha, ha. I do not know where these prison ethics and morals were adopted from, but I think it's a weak and cowards point of view to earn this so-called respect.

I'm here to improve myself, not to let another man degrade me and my outlook and perspective. The only thing you should have to prove is to yourself and your family, who really loves you and been there for you since day one.

My Life In My Cell II

It's misery being behind this cell of stone knowing I let myself and my family down that was really looking up to me.

It's sad and I'm realizing I'm not living My life; I'm only existing in life.

It's death and knowing I'm slowly killing myself from being behind these walls.

Wasting my time when there are many opportunities in the free world.

It's uncomfortable to wake-up to see the same faces everyday, over and over.

There is no freedom of your own, except for at night when you lay down, asleep and dream about your spirits being out.

There is nothing but mental stress going on.

Mistakes of inmates mistaking others and causing problems.

Slavery is like being locked-up.

Prison is a "nightmare." You are never knowing if you are going to make it through the day or in the nights.

Hopefully you hear from family that everything is going peacefully fine.

Doing the best of getting along, working with your cellie.

Washing our laundry in the toilet using it as a washing machine and focusing on your hygiene like never before.

Worrying about money being put on your books, so you can make it to the store to buy soups and eat something different besides the usual state-issued meal of beans almost everyday.

It feels like my life is surrounded by nothing but beans, beans, and more beans and beans, get what I mean Beaner? Ha , ha, ha, ha. It's real talk, too and to tell you the truth, I'm ha, ha, ha, ha, hating it.

So, I hope you youngstas realize what I'm talking about, what goes on behind these walls, each day that goes by day after day. It's up to you to walk what road you choose to walk.

In life nobody is here to tell you wrong, but good. Don't let another man choose your path for you. Be smart with yourself and let go of some things thats not worth the time.

Make your money the right way. Be proud of yourself, don't do it for no one else, they don't care about you.

I'm being real, stay out of these walls of death. If this ain't you, stay out of the game! It ain't gonna provide you nothing but pain.

For the ones that are about to enter these prison gates, the same goes for you, don't let another man or woman choose our path. Be smart and do the right thing.

With this said I may close for now, but not forever.

May God bless you all who are doing time.

**I was dumb once and learned
from it, and I ain't going to
be dumb again
by coming to prison**

MELCHIZEDEK We are extremely honored to have Melchizedek, a first time writer, share his thoughts in the pages of The Beat Within. We are excited about hearing more from this thoughtful writer, who just recently picked up his first issue of The Beat Within. Read on... Melchizedek is probably our first writer from the Ventress Correctional Facility, an Alabama State Prison in Clayton, Alabama. Most of us Beat readers do not know too much about Alabama, maybe Melchizedek will take us there, sharing the good times as well as the bad. We're listening!

Beat

Peace, thanks for sending me the magazine. I really enjoy reading the poems and stories and just the thoughts off the top of people's heads.

I've been writing for awhile now, but I've really taken it serious about a year and a half ago. My writing is how I deal with this time. Your mag, The Beat is just what I need to cope. Everyone vibes like one big happy family. There's so much that I read that made me take a look back to the past just to see how far I've come.

Just to name a few, Broken Glass, whoa! She's great I really feel her and don't know her but I feel as though I've met her through her words. She's deep, I give her mad props she has talent!

There's Tomas Salas, "Upper Middle Class to Ghetto Class" that was a great piece. We're the same age "24." D-Boy's "A Whole 'Nother World!" And the Poetic Prisoner, I can relate to the injustices he feels. Like I call it the Alabama Department of Corruptions.

My name is Melchizedek. I'll explain more in future stories.

Lastly, I would like to let some of the youth reflect on my pain and gain knowledge in their brain.

I hope you enjoy my two stories
Positive education allows constant elevation!

**to understand what is, as
the truth and rotate to
the next generation which
is our youth**

To Be Continued

As the strings of time unwind,
my mind spits lyrics of matter
stimulated off the depths of the mind.

Easy to rewind
thoughts of the great and higher manifested
to the daily visual and tested by many individuals.

My existence is decreasing
by every rise and fall of the sun
which never moves,

but the illusion is cast out as such a fact,
but in all actuality the body is stationary
while the world rotates to perplex the conclusion of this confusion.

Ideal in equality to balance life and nature to grow
strength mentally as well as physically to bring forth
light where there is darkness to create from my image
life itself.

Though my creation of he or she continues the life of me
and my creators to continue the knowledge of the cipher
brought to thee.

Still, without void and form until the seed of knowledge
is planted and sprouts wisdom into knowing what was,
but to understand what is, as the truth and rotate to
the next generation which is our youth,
to be continued....

Thoughts From Within

Thoughts from within manifested
by the inter peace of mind
deep within my well being
confined by the stress of being oppressed
by a system of corruptions.

A battle of the minds
between thieves, junkies, murders, rapists, and drug-
dealers
concur daily.

All the time a constant struggle
develops out of a dog eat dog world
to get to the top

like flies in a jar with the lid tightly screwed down.
This melting pot of corruption is strong and tough,
on incarceration with no real rehabilitation,
born from a society that cares less
about education of the minorities.

An economic bind sends you to a point of destruction
and coaches you to a hopeless void
that forces you to grind,
taking not only yourself

but peers, family, and loved ones with you
to that mental grave of depression.

Once victimized by self,
you slowly begin to come to the conclusion, or should I say, realization
that you're an asset of value in a world corporation.

You're traded around by stockholders,
they're your new-aged slave masters.

For hundreds of years,
times have changed from a physical to a mental state,
where it's hard to recognize with the naked eye
the shackles and chains which hold you back in these days,
soon to be reincarnated one day.

The form is left up to your own mental awareness.
This universe of dualism of your higher and lower self,
where death is like change,
inevitable.

From the womb, evolution is set and developed.
Life feeding off all feelings and emotions.

Seeing what she sees,
from her head you're fed.
The essence of life is broken and another being is brought forth
into another womb of chaos.

Visions of the wise set into action
causes a revolutionary movement of the mind
that changes nature and life itself
into order and inter peace of mind
deep within my well-being,
confined by stress of being oppressed
by a system of corruptions and these manifested
thoughts
from within.

**confined by stress of
being oppressed
by a system of
corruptions and
these manifested
thoughts
from within.**

E-MONEY No Beat special "system" issue, let alone any issue, should go without the legendary E-Money included. We wish we could plug his voice every week. He is definitely one of our favorites. This week he takes us into his world, his cell, his thoughts as he reaches The Beat community from his cell in Folsom State Prison in Represa, CA. E-Money is homegrown! We first met him in our juvenile hall workshops, back in the early days. Upon his sentence to the adult system he gave us his word he would write, write and write, and that he has done. With great pleasure we give you E-Money!

Life In My Cell

Doing life in my cell is like being trapped in an oversized casket where the pain and the suffering are the bugs eating at my flesh, sending a shiver through my bones with just the terrifying thought of the predicament I'm in. It's like I'm suffocating in this place and I'm in desperate need for that life-saving air we know as freedom. I guess that's the six feet filled with dirt that's stacked on top of me, keeping me forever in the dark while my loved ones grieve from my absence. Within everyday, it's like I'm losing another part of my mind in this place and it's nothing I can do about it. I'm just as helpless as a dead man daily being eaten by bugs that all goes by the name of death. I guess it's destiny's calling and the only way possible for me to escape such a predicament is by being dug-up and freed from this cell-like casket with the hopes of God's spiritual healing, curing these bruises that are planted as deep as my soul.

Will I rise in my 7th year like Jesus rose on his 7th day and come to shock the world with these teachings I refer to as blessings? Will God put his hands of divine guidance on my back and choose me with all this pain and suffering I hold inside, to deliver a heartfelt message to the world that will all spiritually, mentally, and physically change us forever? Will God ever allow me to step out of this cell not a half-dead man, but a freed man with the knowledge to turn this globe in the direction I see fit? I guess this is my biggest fear, the thought of me never being heard, the thought of these inner cries for change forever being silent, the thought of me returning to this cell-like casket with a life-saving vision that unfortunately would never have the chance to be manifested. "Lord, please do not let this be my destiny."

When the judge told me that I was being sentenced to the state penitentiary for the sins I've committed, it was like I was being buried alive and all that I could think about was all the people and things I was going to miss, and above all, the torturing cell I was to return to.

All the hopes I had of getting out was suddenly diminished and the reality of "I was going to be here for awhile" slowly started to move in. I was shocked as if I had a bad encounter with electricity and that all I wanted to do was go to sleep to escape reality as if it was a bad nightmare in my dreams. It was like my not so innocent life was being taken away from me as simple as that, and I all of a sudden went from the suspect to the victim. What hurt even more was the thought of there wasn't a soul in the world that could help me. Justice had arrived and all my vicious days of running was over. I felt my heart drop to my stomach the minute she said, "I sentence you to the duration of eight years," and even though I'd agreed to the terms a couple days before, it just didn't seem believable until it came out of her mouth. I felt like a dead man walking, no longer in control of my life, and that's when I came to the realization of how much freedom means to me. That's when I came to the realization that life isn't a game like we call it, but something special like no other. Life is as serious as me sitting right here in this cell for at least the next seven years envisioning life.

Let me welcome you to this little city that goes by the name "Hell on Earth" where everybody got at least one thing in common: "We're all seeking freedom." The flipside about this place, ladies and gentlemen, is your outside inferiors (freedom) can all of a sudden become your inside superiors, (incarceration). "E-Money, you kind of lost me. Can you further elaborate?" Let me serve it to you raw and uncut. Those who you thought you were better than on the streets, such as your school nerd or your neighborhood square, may be that same nerd or square dressed-up in a green suit that says "C-O" (Correctional Officer), and is here to correct your troubled mistakes with excessive correcting, or let's just say "bully-style," even when there's no mistake to be corrected. No need to get all mad and emotional because your sensitive feelings is a sign of weakness in this place and they will be exploited.

Should I proceed? So called dope-dealer, you remember that

It's forever burning inside, wishing upon a key to come free you out.

dope addict that was drooling for another one of your lucky charms, or should I say "crack cocaine"? Guess what? This same dope addict comes behind these walls of prison and due to this is a regular home to him, he may be given the privilege to be your penitentiary "shot-caller," or let's just say your "convicted commander." What he says will go, and what goes "you will do." Catch yourself not doing and get did. Sorry to say, but behind these walls the strong prey on the weak, and even though it may have been your intentions to do a perfect program and get released as soon as possible, the last thing you want to be labeled as is "weak." Therefore, you got to keep your head high and stay strong within this place even if it cost you your life. That's just the price you got to pay physically or mentally, and emotionally pay an ever higher price for a lifetime. I know it doesn't sound fair, or as you may put it, "just," but let me ask you a question: "Is life fair?" You ask me what's life in my cell? And I'll tell you, "Forever struggling and fighting against the evil forces of pain." Can you yet feel my pain or should I elaborate?

I don't think you heard me. I'm a star in the dark seeking for light. I've been stuck out here in this galaxy-like cell with just me, myself, and I. Do it get lonely? You damn right it gets lonely. I'm that little kid in the playground playing by himself wishing upon a friend. My old friends says, "I'm too rough," and plus I'm no longer equal because I'm a convict — so tell me, is this what you really want? Do you want to be stereotyped for a lifetime for an unwise decision you've made ten years ago? Do note: these are my pains, conceived from my desires of wanting to be a thug. Do you still want to be a thug, my little friend?

In summation, life in my cell is being under a constant stress and forever visualizing a freedom that is not guaranteed. It's forever thinking about those I love and wishing I can be there with them. It's watching holiday after holiday pass by, birthday after birthday pass by, and sunny day after sunny day pass by. It's watching loved one after loved one pass on and not being able to attend their funerals. Some people may tell you, "You're not missing out on nothing" as words of comfort, but to keep it real with you, if missing out on life isn't missing out on nothing, I guess you're already dead.

Life in this cell is hell. It's like experiencing what it feels like to talk to the devil. Even though it could be peaceful at times, it also can drive one crazy. It's forever burning inside, wishing upon a key to come free you out. It's something like death, but associated with life. May the Lord have mercy on your soul.

My Intro To My Life In My Cell

First of all- I would like to send my love to both the struggling children and adults of America for allowing me at least one more trip through your minds by you picking up this booklet of many blessings and deciding to read my story.

It's always a blessing to know that there are open ears out there not to only hear me out, but each other and always ready to come to the aid of one of our brothers and sisters when there's a need too. That's what The Beat is all about. The struggling citizens of America's hearts forever beat for each other and understand the struggle of our brethren who are fighting the same war as us. That's to be physically-mentally, and spiritually free. May we all one day collaborate and come together and rise from all this hurt and pain, from all this stress and torture, from all this violence and evil to a godly world where the air we breath is pronounced "love". Remember, "the world is what you make of it."

I just finished reading Beat volume 8.49 and I was impressed by the eye-catching topic, "Life In My Cell" that was utilized in that issue. This is also a topic I feel is meant for anyone serving time behind the bars we know as prison. Therefore, if it's all right with you ladies and gentlemen, I thought I'd put my two cents in this foundation of pain. Hear me out!

DESHAWN LAVENDER The following pieces have been sitting on our desks for a few months, as things tend to do around these parts. We open a letter intending to get right to it, and we get pulled away by a meeting or a workshop or another of the nearly endless pressing needs that seem to come our way every day. So this envelope sat as furniture for a bit, and we never took note of the gems inside. Deshawn Lavender, who writes to us from CSP-Susanville, sent us the following deep poems, and we're proud to publish them here. His poems serve as a way for us to view the world through his eyes, if only for the time we take to read and trip off them. We look forward to receiving more from Deshawn soon.

Ghetto Life

Economically deprived, tossed aside
expected to maintain a quarter of a city,
street fixtures outdated concrete run down
a part of town exhibiting no pity.

A sector of a section
environments we consider our homes,
everyone has a sort of vendetta
FBI installs taps over our phones.
Broken homes overrun by poverty
future isn't anticipated, living in the moment,
live parties relieve social pressures
political aspirations are currently dormant.
Gangsters roam freely overpowering
our cities with persuasion and force,
raping the streets of any innocence
youths inside this environment have little choice.

Who's to blame?

Fingers pointed in opposite directions,
stipulators of America's a free country
others' state — government consciously neglected this section.

Problems continue to exist increased
building of penitentiaries in California's state,
yet, eradicating rehabilitative educational programs
once released, how are ex-cons supposed to relate?

Can we eliminate addictions deteriorating
our precious minds with deadly chemicals,
continuing to devalue our human nature
generations of lost time will be identical.

Ghetto life teaches survival lessons
learn to internalize these techniques,
they're beneficial to yours, mine, ours,
listening to the wise when they speak.

Learn to internalize these techniques

Prison Riot

The yard's engulfed by tension
intensity permeates the atmosphere,
adrenaline flushes through hearts of soldiers
anticipating a strike first attack against peers.

War talk devising strategies
to overthrow the enemy's plans,
deceptive in its most concealing form
smiling while shaking the adversary's hand.

Yard release, the perception is
bodies moving in formation,
positioned in packs of threes and fours
divided in separate locations.

Manufactured weapons sharpened
molded to be held with a tight grip,
pretending to be unaware, engaging the opposition
silently attempting to catch one doing dips.

A sudden outburst, fifty or sixty people
scrambling in hand-to-hand combat,
moans, yells, and screams, knife wounds
lay participants on their backs.

COs yelling "Get Down!" discharging pepper
spray and shooting block guns into the crowd,
madness, violence and terror threatening lives
a racial riot level four "180" style.

Mini-14 bullets rang out "Boo yoo! Boo yoo!"
suddenly aggressive behavior comes to a halt,
tear gas hazes the vision affecting
my eyes and smoke's hurting my throat.

Imagine an old war movie
bodies sprawled out across the yard,
weapons and bloody bodies covers the ground
inmates to guards, everyone has been scarred.

YOUNG D Young D writes the following piece. D, 15, first found out about The Beat Within when he was detained in Juvenile Hall at San Francisco's YGC. Since then, he's come a long way. He now works as an intern where he is learning many things such as typing, and general office skills and how to interact with youth and adults from different backgrounds. We are happy to have him here and he is quite an asset.

what everybody in Juvenile
wants the most and what
they would love to experience
is their FREEDOM

Experiencing New Things

I love experiencing new things 'cause that's what it's all about nowadays. If you don't experience nothin' you ain't go' know nothin' — that's how I feel from my point of view.

I'm writing this piece to all the young teens in Juvi. Being locked up ain't cute. Some people think it is but trust me, it's ugly, I mean real ugly. And the only reason I say that is 'cause I've been there done that, lived that life, don't want it no more.

Let me tell you something — in Juvi you can't experience what you want to experience. For instance, cooking — you can't learn how to cook in Juvenile Hall. And most importantly on the outs — what do we all want most? MONEY. You can't go out and get a JOB if you want to and the shady part about it is you can't even have money in Juvenile. You can't even think about supporting yo' needs in there, but most importantly, what everybody in Juvenile wants the most and what they would love to experience is their FREEDOM. That's the most important thing especially when you locked up in that room — a small ass room at that.

That's what I got to say for now, but until next time... Good Luck to all my young teens locked up in that stressful ass place. One love and I'm out.

CASPER Casper was once a Beat workshop participant in Napa County Juvenile Hall and is now writing us from, unfortunately — CYA. We are always happy to hear from former Beat writers, but we only hope that they will soon write us from the outside world and not a locked facility. We always loved Casper's poetry when he wrote from the hall, and we hope you readers will enjoy it as well from the CYA.

Gray Day

The day is gray
it battles at the base
of all that is kept deep inside,
one second it is light,
feeling all that could be within this day,
then, with the blink of an eye
it is darker than the hour of midnight,
wishing only for the feeling for pain
and all it brings.

This battle rages on at the base
that is deep with in,
I hope this battle will shrink
with the passing years
until then...
I'll let the battle continue in my life.

Sorrow

The light that once was so bright
fades at each passing day that should brought
the three words I've wanted to hear,
from you who spawned me into hatred,
the light grows dim,
dim
so dim my heart is a solid chunk of useless marble
my body is always cold,
I shiver deep within,
deep at the core of all I am,
you who spawned me
caused me only sorrow
to keep me company.
You who spawned me
made sorrow my only friend
all I wish to hear now is...
just the truth.

**I shiver deep
within,
deep at the
core of all
I am**

In The Dark

As I sit in the dark,
the dark void where my soul once resided
longs to be in the light
not outside
but at the base that is inside,
it is neither close "nor" far from the heart,
it should be more in the brain,
which is also dark,
yet closer to the color gray,
like that who precedes the rise of each new day.
My eyes see the red of all that is done,
like the flow down his pierced side,
he who was pinned in vain to the old tree on cavalry,
he is now to make change,
that's why I like his enemy,
he doesn't wish me to change,
he wants me to stay the same.

Space

The smell of sulfur fills the tiny space
from the match book which lit the blaze
the fire burns bright
it was lit for one purpose in sight
I reach across and through the blaze
to grab the liquid help midway through the flight
the hand stops amidst the blaze
the sulfur smell is gone
replaced by a darker smell
the burns increase,
3rd, 4th, and higher
what lead me to be this way
The smell of melting flesh fills this cramped space.

**The smell of
melting flesh
fills this
cramped space**

Inner Child

My soul's light flickered out
as if it was a tattered flag blowing in the fall winds
Once again the urge is burning within
The mad desire to hurt the child who dwells deep within
I once handled the urge with a little help from my little lady friend
Her name is Mary Jane
Her warm breath made my head spin
Now I just let the hurt batter the wounded one within
If the little guy wasn't within
would I choose to live my life full of sin?
The man that I think I am
battles all the good
and turns it to deep routed sin
on the hurt one within

Blake Our old friend Blake, who has been down for 23 years, as a lifer, writes us this week from Avenal State Prison, which is located in Avenal, Ca. His harhitting contribution is the brutal reality of what he has endured these years from within the walls of the system. He steps up huge with the hope of lacing us readers of what a lifer goes through.

How Would You Like To Be In My Shoes? (Part I)

You think you got it bad?

Surrounded by dingy grey walls and cold steel
like an animal taken out of it's natural environment
I pace back and forth in my cage waitin', hopin', and prayin' for a better day.
23 years of bein' told what to do by these racist cowards who flex
stick out their chests because they're protected by some cat who's strapped with a 9
in a gun tower waitin' to shoot my black behind, but don't push me 'cause I'm close
to the edge. a 3rd strike ain't nothing when you're already doing life!

You think you got it bad?

Mama, I ain't happy here!
Through the years I've shed a few tears. I lost my mother in the first year of my
Incarceration, she was the backbone of the family, just being around her made me
feel loved and happy. Pops tried to keep the family tight, but after raising 17
children, he's starting to grow weary and old. God, please bless his soul.
It seems like my family members are startin' to relocate to the cemetery. My oldest brother
passed away from cancer. I talked to him a few days before he died and the last thing
I remember him saying was, "stay strong. I love you little bra and try to stop smokin'!"
And I did for about a year back in '86, but shit, livin' a life filled with danger,
stress, and strife, lightin' up a Camel is the last thing you think will be the cause of
death!

You think you got it bad?

I met a tight sista back in '89
she had a son 5 years old
I guess he could sense that I had a good heart, because him and I became close right from
the start. It seems it was meant to be. Baby girl and I got married and made a baby on the
first family visit and now I'm feelin' like I'm the shit! From '90 to '96 was a trip.
I got into bein' a husband and a father, and by all accounts it has helped me become
a better man. The two days we were allowed to spend alone together as a family made me
look at life a little differently. I always knew I had other skills, so I began to
think, write, and execute.

You think you got it bad?

'96 was a trying year. First, I lost my sister and later on that year they took the
family visits from the lifers. White folks makin' a political statement, two-faced
bastards! Takin' them was a hell of a blow to some lifers, marriages, and relationships
started to fall apart, men who once felt they had somethin' to lose now began to feel
dangerous. But I've blessed so far, the wife is still standin' tall and tryin' to
keep the family together by any means necessary!

You think you got it bad?

I told my daughter when she was five years old that I would be home when she's 10, and each
year on her B-day she reminds me of what I told her. 1999, and it's been three years since
they took the family visits, it's starting to get a little hard on the wife and kids,
but you know, what will be will be, and if it's meant for us to remain a family we will
regardless of the circumstances. Another one of my sisters passed away, the tribe is
Getting' smaller!

You think you got it bad?

2000, a new millennium! I went to the Board the other day and it's the same old shit
they feel I haven't did enough time yet, so I'm stuck for at least another two years
I guess it's time to tell my daughter that I won't be home when she's 10. Damn!!
Another one of my brothers passed away, sure wish I could've spoken to him one last time.
Pops just turned 90 years old, I wonder if I'll make it out before he passes away, too?

You think you got it bad?

2003, Pops passed away the other day!!

I can try to persuade you into leaving the street life alone, but I can only try. I am a living example of the system trying to change a crazy person into an upstanding citizen, yet it is only up to me in the end as well as it is only up to you to change your mind.

check out the rest of Gallea's throw back piece on page 41